

Weekly Compilation of  
**Presidential  
Documents**



Monday, March 20, 2000  
Volume 36—Number 11  
Pages 519–576

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**Editor's Note:** The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents is also available on the Internet on the *GPO Access* service at <http://www.gpo.gov/nara/nara003.html>.

## WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

## PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains statements, messages, and other Presidential materials released by the White House during the preceding week.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is published pursuant to the authority contained in the Federal Register Act (49 Stat. 500, as amended; 44 U.S.C. Ch. 15), under

regulations prescribed by the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register, approved by the President (37 FR 23607; 1 CFR Part 10).

Distribution is made only by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* will be furnished by mail to domestic subscribers for \$80.00 per year (\$137.00 for mailing first class) and to foreign subscribers for \$93.75 per year, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The charge for a single copy is \$3.00 (\$3.75 for foreign mailing).

There are no restrictions on the republication of material appearing in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.

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Week Ending Friday, March 17, 2000

### **The President's Radio Address**

*March 11, 2000*

Good morning. In just a few days, Congress will begin to write the next year's budget. This is an important challenge we in Washington take up every year, with important consequences for the American people. Today I want to talk to you about the outcome I seek for our families and our future.

I've always thought you could tell a lot about people's priorities by what they do first. For me, above all, that means maintaining the fiscal discipline that has brought us to this point of unprecedented prosperity, with 21 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment in 30 years, the longest economic expansion in history. It means staying on the path to make America debt-free by 2013. It means saving Social Security, strengthening Medicare, modernizing it with a voluntary prescription drug benefit that so many of our seniors need and too few can afford. And it means continuing to put the education of our children first, with higher standards, more and better trained teachers, after-school and summer school programs, modernizing our schools.

These are my first priorities. I think they're most Americans' first priorities. But it seems the congressional majority has hardly given them a second thought. Before Republican leaders have put a single penny toward strengthening Social Security or Medicare; before they put a single penny toward a prescription drug benefit; before they put a single penny toward educating our children, they've allocated nearly half a trillion dollars to risky tax cuts. More than half our money already spent—and not a penny on our most pressing priorities.

Unfortunately, the majority tried to take us down this road before. Last year, they went for one big tax cut with one big grab. This year, they're doing it piece by piece, one tax cut after another. Just this week, we

saw Republican leaders attach special-interest tax breaks to what should have been a simple raise in the minimum wage. Now, all these cuts together add up to a serious threat to Social Security and Medicare. They would make it impossible to pay down the debt by 2013 or make vital investments in education, fighting crime, protecting public health and the environment, and other urgent national priorities.

As the budget process begins, I urge Republican leaders to change their course and steer clear of a fiscal dead end. It's wrong for America. It was wrong last year, and it's wrong this year. Let's do first things first.

I urge Congress to write a budget that puts aside enough funds from our hard-won surplus to eliminate the debt by 2013; to write a budget that strengthens and modernizes Medicare with a prescription drug benefit; to write a budget that extends the solvency of Social Security; one that invests in education, extends health coverage to more American families, and meets other pressing priorities.

Of course, Congress still has plenty of time to get its work done right and get it done on time. I hope it will do so. If Congress takes care of first things first, we can also give targeted tax relief to America's families: a tax credit to help pay for college or save for retirement; a tax credit to help care for aging or ailing loved ones; a tax relief to reduce the marriage penalty; tax relief to reward work and family with an expanded earned-income tax credit; an increased tax credit for child care expenses.

I will work with any Member of either party to get these things done. We can get them done, but only in the context of a realistic, responsible, balanced budget, one that maintains our fiscal discipline and makes the most of this great moment of prosperity. Now, that's a budget that makes sense. One that works for working Americans.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## Interview With Sam Donaldson of ABC's "This Week"

March 10, 2000

### Gun Control Legislation

**Mr. Donaldson.** Mr. President, thank you very much for letting us come over and talk to you today. You know, among your top legislative priorities, everyone understands, is gun control. You want trigger safety locks; you want a 3-day waiting period for the sale at gun shows; you want photo ID's, among other things. Going to be tough to get?

**The President.** It's tough to get. We were able to get the Brady bill passed in '93 and the assault weapons ban in '94. And unfortunately, several of the Members who voted for those were defeated because they did. But it's a safer country because of that.

We've had half a million people who couldn't buy handguns because they were felons, fugitives, or stalkers, and we've got the gun death rate down to a 30-year low. So I think nearly everybody who looked at it thinks we ought to close the gun show loophole and require child safety locks on guns and ban the importation of these large ammunition clips. I hope we can do that.

**Mr. Donaldson.** The NRA says that the gun manufacturers have trigger locks now. They say all of the guns being manufactured in this country, the handguns, have the trigger locks. So what's the big deal?

**The President.** They don't all, actually; most of them do. We've worked with a lot of the gun manufacturers, and they deserve a lot of credit. And for the first time, they really showed some genuine independence from the NRA line that nothing ever needs to be done, ever. And they came up with the child trigger locks.

What our legislation would do would be to require the manufacturers to do it. And I would also like to see them make those available to retrofit guns, because a lot of people who have guns now in their homes would like to buy them, would like to protect them in that way. But I think that it would be important.

But closing the gun show loophole is really important because a lot of people who now know they will be checked in gun stores can go to the urban flea markets or to the gun shows and buy a gun and have no background check whatever. And I think it's a big mistake.

**Mr. Donaldson.** Well, of course the NRA says, "We're for that. We're for an instant check at gun shows." And they say, "The Congress appropriated money for you to put into the system so that the insta-check, just like our credit cards, can go through." And they say, "Why hasn't he done it?"

**The President.** Well, not all the records are subject to insta-check. For example, we offer, by the way—most of their allies in Congress want a 24-hour, not a 72-hour waiting period at gun shows. And there's something to be said for that if it's a weekend show and the people are moving on to somewhere else, and all that. So what we offered them was, okay, 24 hours for every one you can check in 24 hours, but over 90 percent of them you can check in 24 hours. But for those you can't check because of some problem with it, we ought to be able to hold them up to 3 days, because the ones that don't check out in 24 hours are 20 times more likely to be rejected because of the problems with the background.

So I think we can work this out. You know, when I brought the Congress in there the other day, the Republican leader in the House, Mr. Hyde, and the Democratic leader, Mr. Conyers, had competing proposals that were much closer together than the rhetoric of the debate would suggest. So I'm still hoping we can work this out.

I think it's fine to let the ones go in 24 hours if you can do the check. But if there is some problem with the records, getting the records, there ought to be some provision to deposit the gun in a neutral place, like the local sheriff's office or something, and finish the check.

**Mr. Donaldson.** When it comes to photo ID's, the NRA says what they say of a lot of your proposals. That is, the criminals are not going to line up; the criminals are not going to come in and say, "Take my picture;

here's my picture." It's the law-abiding citizen that you're going to penalize, who is not going to misuse that gun with all of this stuff.

**The President.** First of all, under my proposal, they would only do it as they buy new handguns, where they would get a photo ID license for showing that you passed a background check and they'd taken a safety course.

Now, therefore, that would make it even less likely that people with criminal backgrounds would try to buy handguns. And I think over the long run, licensing handgun owners is no more unreasonable than licensing people that drive cars, licensing people that do any number of other things, licensing people who want to go hunting or fishing. I don't think there's a thing in the world wrong with it, and I think it will help make us a safer society.

**Mr. Donaldson.** I can't help but remember the little dust-up you had with my colleague Charlie Gibson, who said, "Well, how about registration? I mean, why aren't you for that?" Have you changed your mind about that since Kayla Rolland and these other terrible tragedies?

**The President.** One of the things that I think—the argument for registration, of course, is that it would make it easier to trace these guns through their various incarnations, and I think you can make a strong argument for it. What I have said is that—look, I can't even pass a bill closing the gun show loophole through this Congress. If the people want more done, I think that should be heavily debated in this Presidential election.

The Vice President and Governor Bush are from dramatically different positions on the whole issue of guns, and I think it ought to be a big issue in the Presidential elections, because it's one of the things that will determine the shape of 21st century America—how we handle safety, whether we keep bringing crime down.

But right now, I think it will be a great thing if we can close the gun show loophole, ban the big ammunition clips, require the child safety locks, and require licensing for new handgun owners, including photo ID's and Brady background checks and a training course, safety training course.

**Mr. Donaldson.** But, of course the gun that killed Kayla Rolland, I think, was a .32. Apparently, it had been in the home, for some time, of the little boy who used it. None of this would have stopped that.

**The President.** Well, one thing that might do something was another provision that I asked the Congress to pass—that I asked them again to pass—which is to impose upon adults some responsibility for gun crimes committed by young children if the adults knowingly or recklessly permitted the child to get a hold of the gun. I think that should be a part of the law.

Now, some people say, "Oh, we shouldn't federalize the criminal laws; the States ought to do this." About 17 States have. So what I would—maybe if they don't want to do that, we ought to give some States some incentives to adopt these laws on their own. But it is wrong for adults to leave guns lying around that 6-year-olds can use to kill other 6-year-olds or to kill themselves, which is what most normally happens.

If people are going to have handguns in their homes, they should be rigorously secured and protected. And if they don't have these child trigger locks because they bought them before the child trigger locks were provided, they ought to have to lock them up someplace where the kids can't reach.

In addition—we're talking mostly now about killing. But the accidental gun death rate of children under 15 is 9 times higher in the United States—9 times higher—than that of the next 24 biggest industrial countries combined. So I think there ought to be some responsibility on adults to keep these guns away from children. And that would make a difference.

### **Juvenile Gun Offenders**

**Mr. Donaldson.** By the way, the last time you and I talked about this was after Jonesboro, and one of those shooters there was, I think, 11 years of age. Now, we have a child, 6 years of age. What should we do about that child, that little kid?

**The President.** Well, first, I think that what happens to this child in terms of custody—who has custody over this child; where is this child going to go—ought to be very

carefully debated. Apparently, he was in miserable circumstances. I think that in addition to that, he's clearly below the age of criminal responsibility.

**Mr. Donaldson.** We can't punish that 6-year-old, can we?

**The President.** No, but he—human nature being what it is, he will probably wind up punishing himself as time goes on and he comes to realize what he's done.

**Mr. Donaldson.** And do you think people, as he grows up, will point at him and say, "That was the boy who shot that little 6-year-old many years ago"?

**The President.** If they know. But even if they don't, he'll know. He'll know. And one or two things will happen, unless he's very fortunate. Either he will grow up with no conscience because he won't be able to live with it, and then he'll repeat bad acts, or he'll grow up consumed with guilt for something that was beyond his ability to understand when he was 6. So that child is going to need a lot of help and needs to be in a more constructive upbringing.

But look, all of our sympathies are with the child that was killed and with her family and to trying to prevent that. But the idea that 6-year-olds can get a hold of guns is outrageous. And I think the adults should be held responsible in some way.

#### **President's History With Guns**

**Mr. Donaldson.** By the way, do you own a gun today? You used to, I know.

**The President.** Yes, but I don't have them here in the White House. I have owned guns. When I was a boy, I had a .22, when I was 12. And then I had a shotgun. And I've owned a handgun or two that have been given to me. But I've never kept them in the residence where my daughter slept.

**Mr. Donaldson.** Do you still shoot them today?

**The President.** No. When—I've gone hunting a few times since I've been President, but I've always just gone with friends and borrowed a shotgun.

**Mr. Donaldson.** Recently?

**The President.** When was the last time I went duck hunting? A couple of years ago, I guess.

**Mr. Donaldson.** Well, we started by—

**The President.** Let me say that I grew up in this culture. I've never called for banning guns, banning—I mean, I've never been against sport shooting. I believe that people ought to have the right to do these things. I even had a good relationship with the NRA at one time when I was Governor. They did a lot of good things in my State. They helped train people in gun safety courses, young hunters, for example. They helped to resolve property disputes in rural areas of my State, where we were worried about people hunting in various areas.

I just think that their knee-jerk reaction to any gun safety measure is wrong. That's what I think is wrong. We can't pretend that America can have no prevention, that the only answer here is just to find whoever does something wrong and throw the book at them, but the last thing in the world we'll do is have any prevention. We were all raised to believe that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And this is the only area where we're told there must be no prevention. I just think that's wrong.

#### **National Rifle Association**

**Mr. Donaldson.** Well, sir, you may have once had a good relationship with the NRA, but you don't have it today. I'm sure you're aware of the new television ads that they're running—Charlton Heston, himself, very effective—looks in the camera—and let me just read a portion of one of them. He says, "Bill Clinton says the NRA stands in the way of sensible gun safety. But it was the NRA who pioneered the criminal background check on gun violence, not Bill Clinton." He goes on. But he concludes this way, sir: "Mr. Clinton, when what you say is wrong, that's a mistake. When you know it's wrong, that's a lie." Now, that's tough. That's tough, sir.

**The President.** True or false: The NRA was opposed to the Brady law. True. True or false: The NRA was opposed to the assault weapons ban. True. True or false: The NRA happily ended the congressional careers of brave Members of Congress of my party who stood up to them and voted for the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban. True.

Now, they can say they pioneered background checks. That's a little sleight of hand, artful wording designed to cover up the fact

that they were opposed to the Brady bill. They were opposed to measures that are necessary to, in fact, close the gun show loophole. They're saying, "If you can do an insta-check, it's okay with us. So we don't mind you checking, as long as we're not put in any inconvenience whatever. But the public safety is not nearly as important as our convenience."

Well, you know, we all go through these airport metal detectors all the time. And a lot of us have to go through two, three, four times if we have a money clip or something. And it's a minor inconvenience, but we like it because we all get to stay alive that way. My view is, I have not asked the hunters and sports people of this country, or the sellers at these gun shows, to undertake inordinate inconvenience, but some little inconvenience to preserve the public safety and to do more to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

And all this sort of wounded rhetoric by the NRA, given how ruthlessly brutal they were to Members who were brave enough to vote for the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban is—these crocodile tears, I don't think it will wash with the voters. Even with Moses reading the script.

**Mr. Donaldson.** I've been around a long time. I'm old enough to remember people calling Harry Truman, when he sat there, in this office, a Communist, and a lot of things. But I don't recall a series of well-produced television ads which called the President of the United States a liar. How do you feel about that?

**The President.** It's the way they've treated me for more than a decade. I remember in 1991 the NRA lobbyist in Arkansas came up to me and wanted me to sign a bill that would have prohibited any city in Arkansas from having gun control legislation stronger than the State had. Little Rock, at the time, was being deluged by these gang members coming back, serious weapons and cop-killer bullets. They didn't want cop-killer bullets banned—remember this is the same NRA. True or false: They didn't want cop-killer bullets banned. True. They didn't want to ban them.

So I vetoed the bill. And this young NRA lobbyist, in the lobby of the State Capitol in Arkansas said, "Governor, you're going to run

for President in 1992. And if you veto this bill, we will wipe you out of Texas." And there were 50 people watching, just aghast that this lobbyist would talk to a Governor this way. And I knew I was growing up when I didn't hit him. I smiled, and I said, "Young fellow, if that's the way you feel, you saddle up, you get your gun, I'll get mine, and I'll see you in Texas." The rest is history.

They basically win through intimidation. People are scared of them.

**Mr. Donaldson.** They have almost 3.5 million members.

**The President.** Yes, but there's more people than that in America. And look, I think the reason that they intensely dislike me is because I have hunted in my life, because I'm not anti-gun, I'm not anti-sportsperson, I'm not against the legitimate use of guns. And I actually give credit for the good things they've done in my experience.

But they've got all these charts on the wall—they're domino theory people, you know—if you do one little thing that requires any accommodation to the public safety that requires any effort on the part of gun owners, they think it's the end of the world. And I just think that's wrong.

Maybe technology will give us insta-checks for everything, but there are some of these mental health records you can't get instantly. There are some of the criminal records that are not accessible instantly. I offered them—let's go back to the facts here. Get out of the name-calling and politics.

More people stay alive if you can close the gun show loophole, just like more people are alive because we passed the Brady background check. When a half a million people can't get handguns because they're felons, fugitives, or stalkers, there are more people out there alive today. That's all that I care about. I don't want to get into name-calling with the NRA.

Now, there's a big loophole. I would remind you the NRA—go back and look in '93, when we were trying to pass the Brady bill. They said, "Oh, the Brady bill won't do any good because all the criminals buy their guns somewhere else, at these gun shows or urban flea markets or out of the back of a pickup or the trunks of cars." So now that we want to close that loophole, oh, they don't want



to do that. Or only if it's an insta-check so there's no inconvenience.

Well, you can't get to all the records instantly. So I say, let's sit down and work this out so that there is a meaningful closing of the gun show loophole. That's all I care about. Then they—if we could do that, we save lives. They can call me anything they want and I'd be happy as a clam.

### ***National Rifle Association's Debate Challenge***

**Mr. Donaldson.** Well, let's forget the name-calling. The NRA spokesman said to me, "We'd like to debate President Clinton." Would you consider debating Charlton Heston on this issue? No name-calling, debate the issues.

**The President.** Well, I'll tell you what I want to do. I want to see the issues debated in the Congress. We've had the debate. They came after me in '92; they came after me in '96; we had the debate. They came after the Congress in '94, and they won that one. They elected the Gingrich Congress with the Contract on America. They had a big role in it, because they scared all these hunters into believing I was going to take their guns away.

By '96, the country knew that we were doing background checks and it was working pretty well, and nobody lost their guns. And I went to New Hampshire and said, "You know, they told you I was going to take your gun away, and if you missed a day in deer season, I want you to vote against me. But if you didn't, they didn't tell you the truth, and you need to get even." And that's what happened.

So they got rid of a Congressman in New Hampshire because he voted bravely for the Brady bill, and 2 years later they knew it was a bunch of hooley and they voted with me. So we've had these debates. What I want to see—I don't want to turn this into a circus. I want to turn this into saving lives. I don't want to take the extreme positions and the hot rhetoric.

Henry Hyde, who basically represents a lot of their point of view, offered a way to try to close the gun show loophole. We thought there were serious problems with that, but it was a good-faith offer. So John Conyers

made a counteroffer. Now, here is where the rhetoric is, way out here. Here's where the facts are, right here. And I was disappointed that Senator Hatch wouldn't agree to let them all get together and try to debate these two issues and try to resolve it.

There's got to be a fix here that will save people's lives. That's the only thing that counts. Nothing else matters. The rest of this stuff is all politics; it's inside baseball.

**Mr. Donaldson.** Mr. President, thanks very much.

**The President.** Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 2:45 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House on March 10 for broadcast on March 12. In his remarks, the President referred to a 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; Charlton Heston, president, National Rifle Association; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas. The transcript of this interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 12. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

### **Remarks to the National League of Cities' Congressional City Conference**

*March 12, 2000*

Thank you very much. Mayor Knight, thank you for your leadership of the NLC and for your focus on eliminating racism. Mayor Archer, thank you for your speech and your many years of friendship to Hillary and me. Mayor Anderson; Executive Director Borut; we have the NACo president, Vernon Gray, here today, I know. And I want to thank Mickey Ibarra from the White House for being a good liaison for you and keeping me in touch with you over these years.

Appropriately enough for your commitment, Mr. Mayor, to eliminate racism, I'm thinking today that last Sunday at this time I was in Selma, Alabama, commemorating the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, with John Lewis, Hosea Williams, and many others, and the Mayor of Selma, Governor Siegelman. And this time, when the marchers

went across the bridge, the State police saluted them rather than beating them up. It was a great, great day.

I was talking last night with a gentleman who's worked in the White House for 28 years—not much older than me—and we were saying that it was hard to believe that when we were young men, people could still be killed for trying to vote in this country. So it's important that we recognize we have come a mighty long way. It is important that we recognize that in the last 7 years, as Dennis outlined, we have come a long way economically and socially.

But I want to focus—even though you were kind to say that, Dennis, I always feel when people talk about me now, I feel like I'm a witness at my own funeral. [Laughter] You know, I have nearly a year left in office, and a lot of energy, and I've got a few ideas about what to do with the remaining time.

So I want to talk to you very briefly today about what I think we should do to be your partner in the endeavor to build this one America, devoid of racial bigotry, and what is involved, economically and socially, to make that happen. Dr. King said 35 years ago that we would never truly overcome until there was equal economic opportunity and hope for every American. So the first thing I would like to say is, I think it's quite important that we keep this economy going and that we spread its benefits to people and places who have been left behind.

And to me, that means we have to have a big strategy, which is to keep interest rates as low as possible by continuing to pay down the debt; to continue to open markets around the world, which is why I think this China trade agreement's so important. We give up no market access, and they give us unprecedented market access for our farmers, for our manufacturing products, for our services. It's why I think it's important to save enough of this surplus to make sure we can accommodate the retirement of the baby boomers by saving Social Security and Medicare, because I think this is very important to maintain the overall health of the economy and structure of opportunity.

Then I think we need to build on the work that Vice President Gore and I have done for the last 7 years to expand the winner's

circle. We increased the earned-income tax credit, which helped lift a couple million more Americans out of poverty. We raised the minimum wage. We passed the family and medical leave law that 20 million Americans have now used to take some time off from work.

But I think we should raise the minimum wage again, and I hope that all of you will support that. I believe we should increase the earned-income tax credit, and particularly try to do more to help parents who have more than two children, because they're actually disadvantaged by the law the way it works today. I think we should increase the number of empowerment zones and enterprise communities, because those that have done it have worked so well.

And I hope you will help me to pass my new markets initiative, which is designed to give businesses the same incentives to invest in Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta and the Rio Grande Valley and our Indian reservations that they now have to invest in Latin America or in Asia or in Africa. I want to continue to push this.

We also supported a special investment of over \$100 million in the Mississippi Delta, which is now the poorest part of America outside the reservations, and another \$1 billion initiative in Indian country; a Southwest border initiative designed to encourage further economic development along our border. All these things are profoundly important, because—you know, it's easy to minimize, and not all our problems are economic, but if people have the dignity of a job, if their children can get education, if there's something to get up in the morning and look forward to, it's a lot easier to bring people together, to eliminate social problems, and to move forward.

One big part of this division we have has become known by the slogan, "the digital divide." What it basically means is that access to computers, understanding of how to use them, and access to the Internet and all of its economic and educational opportunities is still divided in this country by region, by income, by level of education, and by race. That's the digital divide.

The bad news is that as we have become a more information-oriented economy, education has acquired a premium, the density of population has been an advantage, and a lot of people have been left behind and inequality increased for several years. The good news is that the very forces that are powering this economy, education and technology, if made available to people everywhere, can reduce inequality and lift people up.

I'll just give you one little example. I was in Silicon Valley, oh, a couple of months ago, with a lot of executives, young executives from eBay, the Internet trading company. A lot of you have probably bought and sold stuff on eBay. And I learned there that there are 20,000 Americans making a living on eBay, and that—not working for the company; making a living trading on eBay—and that a very significant number of them, according to the company's research, were on welfare not very long ago.

So we can use technology to liberate the energy, the intelligence of the poor, of people who've been left behind—if they have access to it, if they know how to use it, and if the educational opportunities are out there. So bridging the digital divide is a profoundly important part of our ability to build one America, to reduce racial and ethnic tensions, and to give everybody a chance to fulfill their dreams. So I hope you will support that.

And I know many of you are working in your own communities to just do that. In our budget, we have funds to establish 1,000 community computer centers so that adults as well as children—who will benefit from hooking up all the classrooms to the Internet and training all the teachers, another part of our initiative—but adults should be able to benefit as well.

And finally, let me say, I think it's very important that we continue our commitment to educational opportunity—to put more teachers in the classroom, to make sure they're better trained, to get the class size down in the early grades, to give after-school and summer school programs to every child who needs it in every difficult environment in the entire United States, to modernize and repair and build schools, so that our kids are

in school buildings that are worthy of their dreams. All these things are important.

And one other point that I would like to make that I think is very important is that you have done a magnificent job of making our streets safer. The crime rate is down to a 25-year low; the murder rate to a 30-year low in America. We've tried to be good partners with you: with the 100,000 police on the street, we're trying to give you 50,000 more, now, for high crime areas; with the other support we've given; and the Brady law, which has kept half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns; and the assault weapons ban. I think these things have made a difference.

But as we have seen again in recent weeks, with the heartbreaking death of little Kayla Rolland, the result of a gunshot fired by another little 6-year-old, her own age, and the deaths in Memphis and elsewhere, this is still a country where the crime rate is too high and where there's too much violence.

And I asked the Congress, as soon as the terrible Columbine tragedy hit, to put legislation to do more to protect our children from unnecessary gun violence on a fast track: to close the gun show loophole, to require child safety locks, to ban the importation of large ammunition clips—it's bizarre, you can't make them and sell them in America now; we still allow them to be imported, which undercuts the assault weapons ban—and to hold adults accountable when they knowingly or recklessly allow little children access to guns.

A few days ago, I met with the congressional leadership, the Republicans and the Democrats from the House and the Senate who have control over this bill. And I pointed out that the House and the Senate passed versions of this bill 8 months ago, and the conference committee has still not met once. And that is wrong.

Now, I know that they are under a lot of pressure not to meet. And you know why: because those who don't want any legislation don't want to get caught killing it. So if they don't meet, then hopefully you'll think about something else tomorrow. And this is wrong. This is wrong.

I remember when I signed the Brady bill, after it had been vetoed in the previous administration, you know, there were all these attacks saying this was just a cheap publicity stunt by me, and criminals didn't buy their guns in gun stores. And it wouldn't make any difference at all. Lo and behold, 6½ years later we've got 500,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers that couldn't get guns. Who knows how many people are alive because of that?

Now, the same people who then said criminals didn't buy guns in gun stores—they bought them from other criminals on the street or at urban flea markets or rural gun shows—now say we shouldn't do background checks at rural gun shows or urban flea markets, unless we can do them instantaneously, because we don't want to inconvenience anyone. Now, let me say to all of you, I actually—I've been out in the country, I mean, in the real country, at one of these rural gun shows. I come from Arkansas. And I'm missing the SEC championship game right now, talking to you. *[Laughter]* But so is everybody here from Alabama, too, so I forgive you.

So I've been there. There is something to this. But look, there's a way to handle this. And I want to say exactly what the issue is here. We can do 95 percent of the checks we need to do, background checks on people that buy guns at gun shows and urban flea markets, in a day. Ninety to 95, somewhere—anyway, less than 10 percent can't be cleared in a day. But there's some people—particularly since a lot of these occur on the weekends—that can't be cleared in a day, that involve mental health records or certain criminal records. And here's what the hangup is: Of the somewhere between 5 and 10 percent you don't clear in a day, the rejection rate for them under the standards is 20 times higher than the rejection rate of the other 90 percent. So this is not an idle deal here. I don't know about you, but I don't mind being inconvenienced a day or 2 if it saves another child's life and if it'll save hundreds of children's lives.

So this is profoundly important. And again, I don't think this is much of a partisan issue out there in the cities of America. And it shouldn't be here. Now, I asked the Senate and the House to take action by the anniversary of the Columbine tragedy, on April 20th.

And I hope and pray that they will. But we could use a little help from our friends. You could just nudge them along there.

And you need to know that after I had this meeting the other day—I was stunned by this, but—after I had this meeting the other day and I thought we were making progress, I then found out there was a movement in the Congress to stop us from giving you money for the gun buyback program. Now, a lot of you have run these gun buyback programs. And I think that's very important, because while you hear all these stories about, "Oh, there are over 200 million guns in America. There's nothing we can do about any of this anyway"—that's, come on, that's true, but it's misleading, because a lot of guns are in the hands of serious hunters and sports people, and they're totally secure, and nothing's ever going to happen—a lot of these guns are in the hands of serious collectors, and they're very responsible, and they're protecting them. And a lot of them are out there rolling around, and they're very dangerous. And a lot of cities, under Republican and Democratic mayors' leadership, have had these gun buyback programs, which have actually helped reduce the number of these guns that are out there rolling around.

So again, I ask for your help here. I think we ought to be giving you more money for gun buyback programs, not less. It's totally voluntary, and I think they work.

So, I've said enough about that, but it's a big deal. It's a big deal. I see my friend Mayor Menino down here, and you know, I've been in Boston a lot. I've spent a lot of work and time in Boston. I've watched the crime rate go down there. I saw them go nearly 2 years without a single kid under 18 being killed by a gun. And I saw them do it, and I actually believe racial relations within the community were improving, which is something we—again, I would argue, if you want to build the safest big country in the world, you've got to succeed at the mayor's project here. You can't have the communities pitted against one another. You can't have people who believe the quality of the justice they get and the way they're treated by the police depends upon the color

of their skin. And you can't have police believe that they can't be respected in the community because of the color of their uniform.

And the mayors, of all people, and those of you who are in city government, you know this. And if there was ever an argument for getting rid of racism and working through this, it is our desire to make America the safest big country in the world. We will never get there if we don't get there together. And so this whole crime issue is still, I believe, profoundly important.

And finally, let me just say that the longer I serve here and the older I get, and maybe the shorter my tenure of service gets, the more I try to focus on, you know, the big things, the things that will really make a difference over the long run to America. And I—the reason I think this issue of race is so important is that I think it sort of is a magnet for all the fears that people have. It becomes a convenient explanation for all the problems that people have.

And it's not just in this country. You think about the troubles in this old world today. We thought—oh, probably 15 years ago, naively—if we could just win the cold war and nobody believed in communism anymore, then nobody would want to have these big old bombs and blow people up anymore, and we could go on together to bring the Earth forward. And what have we seen since then? From the Middle East to the Balkans, and Bosnia and Kosovo, to Northern Ireland to the tribal conflicts of central Africa, all over the world, we see people—and what are they fighting over now? They're fighting over their racial, their ethnic, their religious, their tribal differences, their primal differences—the oldest problems of human society. In the Internet age people are fighting over our differences from other people.

And once you decide that what's different about you is more important than what you've got in common, then it's not very far from different to dehumanization. And once you get to dehumanization, it's not very difficult to justify violence. And once you think you're beating up on somebody who's not really somebody after all, it's not very far from there to get to killing them. And so you had, in Rwanda, 800,000 people, more or less, killed in 100, 120 days, most of them

without the benefit of a gun. Can you imagine that? Most of them with machetes and sticks. And you had one million people driven from their homes in Kosovo because they were Muslims. And on and on and on.

And I'm honored that the United States is in a position to try to minimize those problems and heal those wounds. But make no mistake about it, we won't be able to do that over the long run. We won't be able to do good around the world unless we are good here at home.

And a lot of this work is something that you have to do. You know, when Matthew Shepard's put out on a rack in Wyoming, or James Byrd's dragged to death in Texas, or those little kids at the school in Los Angeles were shot at because they were Jewish, or a Filipino worker was killed because he was Asian and he worked for the Federal Government, or that Korean Christian was shot coming out of his church in the Middle West, all those things—the former basketball coach at Northwestern murdered walking on the street because he was an African-American. When those things happen, there are things we can do. We ought to pass the hate crimes legislation. We ought to pass the employment non-discrimination legislation. We ought to put more police on the street in the high-crime areas. There are things we can do.

But fundamentally, we have to get people to define their worth and their merit in ways that are affirmative, not negative. We have to get people to understand that this brilliant new human genome project is uncovering the fact that we are genetically 99.9 percent the same. And I know that's tough for some people to deal with. When I said that in the State of the Union Address, in the House Chamber, the Republicans and the Democrats looked at each other in total disbelief. *[Laughter]* I mean, we've got to think all this stuff really matters. You know, we all get all puffed up.

I want to tell you, just in that vein, I keep on a little table—you've seen these pictures of these meetings I have in the Oval Office? You know, there's two chairs; the President sits in one, somebody else sits in the other, and then there's two little couches, and there's a table. Well, on that table, I now have a vacuum-packed Moon rock that Neil

Armstrong gave me when he came in and we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Moon landing last year.

And the thing I want you to know about this Moon rock is, it is 3.6 billion years old. So I leave it right there on the table. And then people get so exercised and angry, and they're talking about this, you know. And I say, "Time out. See that rock there? It's 3.6 billion years old. We're just passing through. Chill out, here." [Laughter] We're just passing through.

I want you to laugh about it, but it does, it kind of puts it in perspective, doesn't it? You've got to see all these things in perspective.

I heard a cute story the other day. You know what a snail says when he's riding on a turtle's back? Wheel! [Laughter] I mean, it all depends on your—you've got to—I'm telling you, I'm having a little fun, but this is a big deal. I mean, how you look at these things is everything.

It's funny, isn't it? After we live our lives, and we turn gray—the mayor and I, anyway; Dennis wishes he could turn gray—[laughter]—and you think about all the things you learned and how hard you worked and all the stuff you think you did. And then you strip it all away, and what really matters is what you told your kids when they were little. You know, what's in your heart? And how do you view your neighbor? And can you love your neighbor as yourself? And who is your neighbor, anyway?

So I say to you, I'm happy about the way we're starting the new century. I believe we can reach all of our big goals. But I think that your leader here is right. We can reach all the rest of them if we do it together. And some of what we have to do we can legislate, and some of what we have to do is an affair of the heart. But the real trick in life is to take what is right in the heart and make it live in life. And that requires systematic, sustained, organized effort.

I watched them in Boston. They didn't have no racism in the police department overnight and by accident, and they still have challenges with it. But they train to do the right thing. They work to do the right thing. It is a disciplined effort; you have to care about these things.

So we will do our part. But I came here more than anything else to thank you for the last 7 years and to tell you that this mayor and this program is the most important thing you could be doing today. If on this Sunday, the good Lord came to me and said, "Your time on Earth is over, and you've got to check out today, and you don't get to finish your term. And I'm not a genie; I'm not about to give you three wishes"—[laughter]—"but you can have one." I wouldn't wish for continued prosperity. I wouldn't wish for finding outer galaxies, to see if there's life there. I would wish for our country to be one America.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Donald J. Borut, executive director, and Mayors Bob Knight of Wichita, KS, president, Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, first vice president, and Karen J. Anderson of Minnetonka, MN, second vice president, National League of Cities (NLC); C. Vernon Gray, president, National Association of Counties (NACo); civil rights activist Hosea Williams; Mayor Joe T. Smitherman of Selma, AL; Governor Don Siegelman of Alabama; Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston, MA; and former astronaut Neil Armstrong.

### **Remarks to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Luncheon in Cleveland, Ohio**

*March 13, 2000*

Thank you so much. I want to say, first, how honored I am to be here with our leader, Dick Gephardt, and how much I look forward to his becoming the Speaker of the House. He is a truly remarkable human being and a really wonderful leader.

I want to thank Stephanie Tubbs Jones for welcoming me here and for doing such a good job for you. I'm delighted to be here with Marcy Kaptur and Dennis Kucinich. And I'm glad to see Sherrod Brown up and around. I told him he looked like a Roman soldier in one of those 1960's extravaganzas with that brace on.

I want to thank Congressman Jim Barcia for coming to Cleveland to be with us today, and Congressman Patrick Kennedy, who had

to leave. And Mayor White, thank you for making us feel so welcome. Maryellen O'Shaughnessy, thank you for running for Congress. I certainly do hope you win, and I'm going to do what I can to help you. I'm glad to see you out here.

And I want to thank our Senate candidate, Ted Celeste, also, for running in this race and for being here today, and my good friend Lou Stokes. I told some people a story when I was coming out—when I was here with Lou Stokes—I wanted to come to Cleveland with Lou before he left the Congress. I was here in his district many times when he was in Congress, but the last time we visited an elementary school in this district where there was an AmeriCorps project and the kids were tutoring these grade school kids—our young AmeriCorps people were.

And so we went to this assembly, and I gave a little talk. And then I was shaking hands with all these 6- and 7-year-old kids. And I got to the very end of the line, and this 6-year-old looked at me, and he said, "Are you really the President?" [*Laughter*] So help me, this happened. I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "But you're not dead yet." [*Laughter*] And it was clear to me that he had learned in school his Presidents were George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and a part of the job description was that you had to be deceased. [*Laughter*] There's been a day or 2 in Washington in the last 7 years when I thought the kid might have been right. [*Laughter*] But I will always remember that.

I also am glad to be here today just to say a profound word of thanks to the people of Cleveland and the State of Ohio for being so good to me and to the Vice President, for giving us your electoral votes in 1992, and by a much wider margin in 1996. And I hope the trend continues in 2000.

I'm here primarily, as all of you know, to support these Members of the House and the candidates and the drive to restore a Democratic majority in the House. And I'm here for three reasons, basically.

One, they deserve it because they took the tough decisions that turned this country around and paid the price for it. We had no votes from the other side when we passed the economic plan in 1993, which drove in-

terest rates down, investment up, and got this economy going again. And they deserve it. They also put their lives on the line to vote for the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban and the efforts to put 100,000 police on the streets, which has given us a 25-year low in crime and a 30-year low in the gun death rate in America. Half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers were denied weapons because of the Brady bill. So they have earned it.

They provided large margins for the Balanced Budget Act in 1997, and for every other piece of progressive legislation that has passed, from the family and medical leave law to increasing the earned-income tax credit to tax relief for working families. And I could just go right on down the line, achieving 90 percent of our children with basic childhood immunizations for the first time, cleaner air, cleaner water, and a growing economy. So they've earned it.

Two, there are huge differences between the parties still on a lot of very fundamental issues. And Dick mentioned a few of them, but I just want to tick off three or four. Number one, if you want this economy to keep growing, we have to remember to dance with what brought us: We've got to keep paying down the debt; we've got to save Social Security and Medicare in a way that doesn't cause the baby boomers retirement to bankrupt our children; and we've got to save enough money to invest in education and health care.

We can still have a modest tax cut that will do an awful lot of good for a lot of people, to help people pay for health care costs, to help people pay for child care costs, to help defer the cost of tuition for sending your kid to college, for doing a lot of other things. But we have got to first keep the economy strong. We've got a chance to get this country out of debt over the next 12 or 13 years for the first time since 1835. And if we do it, we'll have low interest rates for a generation and the highest economic growth we've ever had. We'll continue this expansion. The Democrats will support that. Our friends in the other party will support a tax cut so large that we'd either have to cut education, not save Social Security or Medicare, cut defense, or go back to running deficits. So it's a clear choice.

Second is education. Our agenda is clear. We want smaller classes, more teachers, better trained teachers. We want to modernize and repair schools, which is profoundly important. We want to hook every classroom up to the Internet. We want high standards which support the kids, more after-school and summer school programs. And we want more efforts to give people the excellence that they need. And every single year we have to wait until the very end of the legislative session and have a huge fight to get our education agenda through. And we normally get about 70 percent of it, but only because all of us stay together. This will become more and more and more important.

Third, it is important to continue to give more people the chance to be a part of this economic prosperity who haven't done it yet. That's what our new markets initiative is all about, to give you who can afford it the same incentives to invest in poor neighborhoods in Cleveland, in Indian reservations, in the Mississippi Delta, in south Texas, and places like that that we now give you to invest in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

If we can't give the poor areas in America today the opportunity to have free enterprise, when will we ever get around to it? And I think that's very important.

The fourth thing I want to mention is health care. It's very important. We believe that people between the ages of 55 and 65 that lose their health insurance ought to be able to buy into Medicare and ought to be given a little help to do it. We believe that people who are taking care of aged parents or disabled family members ought to get a \$3,000 tax credit to help them do it. We believe that the Children's Health Insurance Program, which we passed in 1997, should also include the parents of those children. And if we did those things, 25 percent of the uninsured population in America would have health insurance, and the health care providers in this country, many of whom have difficulties, would have a lot more cash flowing to them to keep a healthy health care system.

These are just some of the issues. There are big differences. And Dick mentioned the final one I want to mention. I have been involved for way over 20 years now in law en-

forcement. The first elected job I ever had was as attorney general of my State. I have always believed that we could drive crime down and diminish racial and other tensions between the police and the community. I have always believed that we had to have both smart punishment and smart prevention. I have always believed that. And for 7 years we have worked to put more police on the streets, to give our children something to say yes to as well as something to say no to, and to keep guns away from criminals and kids without undermining the legitimate interests of hunters and sports people.

Now, what I've tried to do, since the Columbine tragedy, in particular, and in the aftermath of the terrible deaths in the last couple of days, is to say, "Okay, let's do some more things that make sense. Let's require child trigger locks on all new handguns that are sold. Let's require background checks at these gun shows and urban flea markets, as well as at gun stores. Let's hold parents who are flagrantly irresponsible—or other adults, custodial adults—and let 6-year-olds get guns, let's hold them responsible for what they do. And let's ban the importation of these large ammunition clips." We banned assault weapons in America, and then people get around it by importing them.

This is all very sensible. It doesn't affect anybody's hunting, doesn't affect any sports shooting. It's no big problem. And all the practical problems can be worked out.

Well, we had a lot of energy after Columbine for doing that. The Senate passed a strong bill, because Al Gore broke a tie vote. The House passed a much weaker bill. But then they were supposed to get together, pass a compromise, agree on provisions, and send it to me. Eight months later, they still haven't met. The committees haven't met. So I ask them to meet.

Now, in the aftermath of the terrible losses in Michigan and Tennessee—little Kayla Rolland—I thought we could have some more energy for doing this. And what happened? The NRA started running all these ads attacking me, personally, which I didn't take personally. I, frankly, was honored by it. But they were—and so I agreed to go on ABC, Sam Donaldson's program Sunday, and answer questions about this. And all I did



was to say why I was for closing the assault weapons; why I was for banning these large capacity ammunition clips, the import of them; why I was for closing the gun show loophole; why I was for child trigger locks; and why I thought adults who were knowing or reckless in letting little kids get a hold of guns ought to be held responsible.

And then the head of the NRA came on after me, and he said—I want to read you what he said, just so you'll know that there is a difference here between the two parties, and America has to choose. He says that I am willing to accept a certain level of killings to further my political agenda and Vice President Gore's.

"I believe—I have come to believe that Clinton needs a certain level of violence in this country. He's willing to accept a certain level of killings to further his political agenda and his Vice President's, too."

Now, it's quite one thing to say that when you're on national television. It's another thing to look into the eyes of a parent who's lost a 6-year-old and say that, to visit, as I did, the parents of the Columbine kids, or in Springfield, Oregon, or Jonesboro, Arkansas, and say that.

I want you to know this because I'm not trying to put you in a depressed mood. I'm trying to fire your energy for the coming combat. Maybe he really believes this. But if he does, we've got even more trouble than just a horrible political mistake. We've got to make up our mind as a country.

I'm glad the crime rate is at a 25-year low. I'm glad the gun death rate is at a 30-year low. I don't know a single living American who believes this country is safe enough. The NRA says we ought to prosecute gun crimes more. I agree with that, and we have. They're for holding adults accountable when they recklessly give kids access to guns—good for them. But they're not for anything that is a preventive measure, that might require the slightest effort on the part of the people they propose to represent, even if making that effort lets everybody else live in a safer America. They were against banning cop-killer bullets—and there weren't any deer in the deer woods wearing Kevlar vests.

So I regret this. And I'm not going to get in a shouting match about it, but I want you

to know that there are big stakes here. So I want to help these people because they've earned it, and they've given you a good country to live in and a stronger America because they're right on the issues.

And the third reason that I want to be for them is the point Dick made about wanting to run the House in a bipartisan manner and to set a good example. One of the reasons I ran for President is that I was completely turned off, as a Governor of what my predecessor called a small southern State, at the way that Washington was so much in the grip of name-calling and an attempt to systematically undermine other people personally. I thought it was wrong. And now that I've had some passing experience with it, I feel more strongly about it. I'm not running for anything, but I'm telling you, this is a great country, and you deserve a better climate than you have been getting in Washington, DC. And you've got to have people who will stand up and say that. I've worked as hard as I could to build one America out here in the grassroots, to get people to come together across racial lines and religious lines and the other lines that divide us, and to be a force for that kind of harmony around the world.

But it is difficult for America to do that if what they see in the national political leadership is this sort of slash-and-burn—well, the kind of stuff I just read you. And I think we can do better than that. And I know he'll be better than that. And these Members will be better than that.

Folks, we've got a lot of honest differences of opinion. And maybe they're right some times, and we're not always right. But I know one thing—we are right to believe that elections ought to be fought about what's good for you and what's good for your life and not whether we can decimate our adversaries. And that's the kind of Speaker Dick Gephardt will be.

So when people ask you why you came here today, say, "Well, they've done a good job, and they deserve our support. They've got better ideas for the future, and that's what matters. And not only that; I like the way they will run our Nation's Government.

I will feel better when they're having arguments up there over policy instead of personalities, and when they're trying to put people first and actually get something done."

Those are three good reasons for you to be here today, and I hope you will share those with all your friends and neighbors in this area. If you do, you'll dramatically increase the chances of their success in November.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:39 p.m. in the lobby at the Playhouse Square Center. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Patrick J. Kennedy, chairman, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Mayor Michael R. White of Cleveland; Maryellen O'Shaughnessy, candidate for Ohio's 12th Congressional District; former Representative Louis Stokes; 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; Sam Donaldson, cohost, ABC's "This Week"; and Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

## Remarks to the Community in Cleveland

March 13, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you. First, I think Wanda did a pretty good job, don't you? Let's give her another hand. *[Applause]* I am delighted to be here in Cleveland. I want to thank all the people who are up here with me. Alice Katchianes, thank you for being here, and Mr. Venable, thank you for your welcome. If I could sing like that, I'd be in a different line of work. *[Laughter]* I thought that was great.

I want to thank Congressman Sherrod Brown and Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones, my great friend Lou Stokes, all the other officials who are here today. State Representative Jack Ford; County Commissioner Jimmy Dimora; State Senate candidate Donna McNamee, a woman I met at the dedication of the FDR Memorial, at President Roosevelt's wheelchair. I'm glad to see her here.

I want to say a special word of appreciation to Congressman Dick Gephardt for his leadership and his passionate commitment to this

and so many other good causes. Without him and these other members of our caucus, we wouldn't have a prayer of passing this proposal today. And I thank him.

And I want to say, obviously, how pleased I am to be here with Donna Shalala, who is, as Dick Gephardt suggested, not only the longest serving but, by a good long stretch, the ablest and best Secretary of Health and Human Services this country has ever, ever had. And I love to see her mother, and I'm glad she made room for me at tax time. *[Laughter]* I told her, I said, "You know, when I get out of this job, I hope I need the services of a tax lawyer." *[Laughter]* Right now, it's all pretty straightforward. But that was, without a doubt, the shortest speech I ever heard a lawyer give, what she said to me. *[Laughter]* You probably doubled your business just by being here today.

I do love coming to Cleveland, and you heard Donna say that we have a lot of people in this administration from Cleveland, including my Deputy Chief of Staff, Steve Ricchetti, who is here today. But Clevelanders, they may go anywhere, but they never get it, Cleveland, out of their soul. If you go into Steve's office, there is a great photograph from the opening day of baseball at Jacobs Field in 1994. Now, I remember that because I threw out the first pitch. But Steve's got the picture on the wall because when I threw the pitch, everyone was absolutely stunned that it didn't hit the dirt—*[laughter]*—and Sandy Alomar caught it. So he really got—I'm incidental to the picture. He's got Sandy Alomar catching a ball which he was convinced would go into the dirt. I thought I did pretty well for a guy who played in the band, myself. *[Laughter]*

Let me say, this is a great time for this city and a great time for our Nation. As I said in the State of the Union Address, I hope this time will be used by our people to take on the big challenges facing America. One of those big challenges is what to do about the aging of America, which is a high-class problem. That is, we're living longer; we're living better. And the older I get, the more I see that as an opportunity, not a problem. But it does impose certain challenges on us.

There is also a challenge to modernize our health care systems and to do other things

to increase the health care of the American people. And that's what we're here to talk about today.

But because this is my only formal opportunity to be before—thanks to you—before the press and, therefore, the American people, I would like to just refer to another issue that relates to the health and safety of the American people, just briefly.

I have been fortunate enough to have the support of the Members of Congress on this stage in our efforts to drive the crime rate down, to make our streets safer, and Cleveland and every other major city in America is a safer place than it was 7 years ago. We have a 25-year low in crime, a 30-year low in the gun death rate. And I am grateful for the support I have received to put more police on the street, to have more summer school and after-school programs for young people, and to do more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, banning the cop-killer bullets, the assault weapons ban, the Brady bill, which has kept half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns.

Now, all of you know we had some tragic deaths last week. We had that 6-year-old girl killed in Michigan by a 6-year-old boy, who was a schoolmate of hers. We had terrible shootings in Memphis. And just in the last year we had that horrible incident at Columbine High School, almost a year ago, and in the year before that, lots and lots of school shootings.

Now, after Columbine, I suggested that what we ought to do is to, number one, make sure there were child safety locks on these guns; number two—which would have made a big difference in the case of children getting the guns. Number two, make sure we ban the importation of large ammunition clips which make a mockery of the assault weapons ban because they can't be made or sold here in America, but they can be imported. Number three, close the loophole in the background check law, the Brady law, which says people can buy handguns at gun shows or urban flea markets and not have to do a background check. It's a serious problem. And fourth, I think when adults intentionally or recklessly let little kids get a hold of guns, they should have some sort of re-

sponsibility for that. And so I asked the Congress to do that.

Eight months ago, Vice President Gore broke a tie in the Senate and passed a pretty strong bill, and then a bill passed in the House that was weaker. And I asked them to get together and pass a final bill. And they never even met until last week when we got them together after this last round of horrible shootings.

And I ask all Americans to join me, because I think these things are reasonable. This won't affect anybody's right to hunt or sport shoot or anything, but it will save kids' lives.

The response we got from the National Rifle Association was to run a bunch of television ads attacking me. And yesterday morning I went on television again to talk about these measures. I'm not trying to pick a fight with anybody. I'm trying to fight for the lives of our kids. But I want you to see what we're up against whenever we try to change here.

The head of the NRA said yesterday—I want to quote, he said that my support of these measures was all political, and he said this: "I have come to believe that Clinton needs a certain level of violence in this country. He's willing to accept a certain level of killing to further his political agenda and his Vice President, too."

Well, he could say that on television, I guess. I'd like to see him look into the eyes of little Kayla Rolland's mother and say that or the parents at Columbine or Springfield, Oregon, or Jonesboro, Arkansas, or the families of those people who were shot in Memphis.

I say that, again, to emphasize change is hard, but sooner or later, if you know you've got a problem, you either deal with it or you live with the consequences. And the older you get, the more you understand that.

We do not have—I'm grateful that our country is a safer place than it was 7 years ago. I don't think it's safe enough. I don't think you think it's safe enough. I don't think you think it's safe enough for seniors. I don't think you think it's safe enough for little kids. And if we can do more things to keep guns away from criminals and children that don't have anything to do with the legitimate right of people to go hunting or engage in sports

shooting, we ought to do it. And we ought not to engage in this kind of political smear tactic.

Now, I feel the same way about this issue. And I want to try to explain to you what is going on now with this issue, because most people in America—you heard Dick Gephardt talk about it—most people in America think, well, why are we even arguing about this? Well, all health care issues are fraught with debate today. I know you're having a big debate here about hospital closures in Cleveland, and I don't know enough about the facts to get involved with it, but I'll tell you this. One of the problems we have is, there's too much uncompensated care in America.

And we're trying to—we're trying hard, the people you see on this stage, we're trying hard to make sure every child that's eligible is enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program that was created in 1997. We want Congress to let their parents be insured under the same program. We want people over 55 but under 65 who aren't old enough for Medicare but have lost their insurance on the job, to be able to buy into Medicare, and we want to give them a little tax credit to do it. If we do things like this, then whatever happens in Cleveland or anyplace else will have to be determined based on the merits of the case, but at least the people who need health care will be able to know that the people who give it to them, whether it's hospitals or doctors or nurses or whoever, will be able to get reimbursed for it. And that's a very important thing. I hope you'll support us in that.

And then we come to the issue at hand. Now, what's this about, this prescription—you all know what it's about. If we were starting—suppose I came here today as President, and I were in my first year as President, and I proposed Medicare, just like President Johnson did in 1965, in the first full year after he was elected, and I told you in 1965 what he said, it would be fine. But in 2000, if I said, "Okay, I'm going to set up this health care program for senior citizens. And you can see a doctor, and we'll pay for your hospital care. But even though we could save billions of dollars a year keeping people out of hospitals and out of emergency rooms by cov-

ering the medicine, we're not going to cover medicine." If we were starting today, given all the advances in prescription drugs in the last 35 years, you would think I was nuts, wouldn't you? The only reason that prescription drugs aren't covered by Medicare is that it was started 35 years ago, when medicine was in a totally different place. That's the first thing.

The second thing I want to say is that it has really cost us a lot not to cover these seniors. And you see American seniors, for example, who live in New York or Vermont, going to take a bus trip to Canada because they can buy drugs made in America for 30 percent less, because very often the seniors, the people that are least able to pay for these drugs are paying the highest prices for them.

Now, that's why our budget has this plan. And I want to tell you exactly what we propose and what we're all up here on this stage supporting today. We want to provide with Medicare a prescription drug benefit that is optional, that is voluntary, that is accessible for all—anybody who wants to buy into it can—a plan that is based on price competition, not price controls. That is, we don't want to control the price, but we want to use the fact that if we're buying a lot of medicine, seniors ought to be able to get it as cheap as anybody else. And we also want it to be part of an overall plan to continue to modernize Medicare and make it more competitive. Because, I can tell you, I'm the oldest of the baby boomers, and people in my generation, we're plagued by the notion that our retirement could cause such a burden on our children, it would undermine their ability to raise our grandchildren. We don't want that.

Now, medically speaking, this is not just the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. As I said, we already pay for doctor and hospital benefits. But an awful lot of seniors go without prescription drugs—and preventive screenings, I might add—that ought to be a part of their health care. We've worked hard to put preventive screenings back into Medicare, for breast cancer, for osteoporosis, for prostate cancer. These are very, very important. But not having any prescription drug coverage is like paying a mechanic \$4,000 to fix your engine because you

wouldn't spend \$25 to change the oil and get the filter replaced.

In recent months, I have been really encouraged because a number of Republicans have expressed an interest in joining us to do this. And we can't pass it unless some of them join us, because we don't have enough votes on our own. But so far the proposals they're making, I think, are not adequate, and I'll explain why.

There are two different proposals basically coming out of the Republicans. Some of them propose giving a block grant to the States to help only the poorest seniors, those below the poverty line. That would leave the middle income seniors, including those that are lower middle income, just above the poverty line, to fend for themselves. And here in Ohio, 53 percent of all the seniors are middle income seniors. None of them would be covered by this plan.

In 1965, when Medicare was created, some in Congress used these very same arguments. They said, "We should only pay for hospital and medical care for the poorest seniors." They were wrong then, and they're wrong now. More than half the seniors today without any prescription drugs at all are middle class seniors. I want to say that again. More than half the seniors without any prescription drugs at all are middle class seniors. On average, middle class seniors without coverage buy 20 percent less drugs than those who have coverage, not because they're healthier but because they can't afford it. And even though they buy 20 percent less medication—listen to this—because they have no insurance, their out-of-pocket burden is 75 percent higher—without insurance, 75 percent higher.

So I say, let's do this right. This is voluntary. We're not making anybody do it. But we ought to offer it to everybody who needs it. It doesn't take much, if you're a 75-year-old widow, to be above the so-called Federal poverty line. You can have a tiny little pension tacked on your Social Security, and you can be there. But if you've got, as you've just heard, \$2,300 worth of drug bills a year—and a lot of people have much higher—it's a terrible problem.

Now, some other Members of Congress are proposing a tax deduction to help sub-

sidize the cost of private Medigap insurance. If any of you own Medigap, you know what's the matter with that proposal. This proposal would benefit the wealthiest seniors without providing any help to the low and middle income seniors. And the Medigap marketplace is already flawed. Today—listen to this—in Washington, the General Accounting Office is releasing a report that shows that Medigap drug coverage starts out expensive and then goes through the roof as seniors get older. On average, it costs about \$164 a month for a 65-year-old to buy a Medigap plan with drug coverage, and premiums rise sharply from there.

For example, in Ohio, an 80-year-old person would pay 50 percent more than a 65-year-old person for the same coverage under Medigap. This is not a good deal, folks. We don't want to put more money into this program. It is not a good deal. Even those who offer Medigap plans say the approach wouldn't work, because it would force Medigap insurers to charge excessively high premiums for the drugs or to refuse to participate at all.

Now, there's another problem that we have in the Congress, which is that the congressional majority just last week voted on budget resolutions that together allocate nearly half a trillion dollars to tax cuts. And if we cut taxes that much, we won't be able to afford this. And we may not be able to save Social Security and Medicare and pay down the debt and have money left over to invest in the education of our children.

I'm for a tax cut, but we've got to be able to afford it. And we, first of all, have got to keep this economy going. We need to pay down the debt. We can get out of debt for the first time since 1835, within a little more than 10 years, if we just keep on this road. A lot of you never thought you'd ever see that.

We can lengthen Social Security out beyond the life of the baby boom generation. We can put 25 years on the Medicare program, which is longer than it's had in blows and blows, a long time. And we can add this prescription drug coverage. But we can't do it if the tax cut's too big, and we shouldn't do it in the wrong way and say you can only

get it if you're really poor, or you can only get it if you buy into Medigap.

Now, let me tell you why this is such a big deal. The average 65-year-old in America today has a life expectancy of 82 to 83 years. The average 65-year-old woman has a life expectancy higher than that. The fastest growing group of American seniors are those over 85. So to knowingly lock ourselves into a program that would get 50 percent more expensive as you got older and older and needed more and more medicine and had less and less money, does not make much sense. We have given them a good program. It is the right thing to do. And so I would like to ask all of you to help all of these Members of Congress on the stage and to tell the people in Washington, "Look, this is not a partisan issue." You know, a lot of people say, "We don't want to do this. This is an election year." Look, they can name this prescription drug program after Herbert Hoover, Calvin Coolidge, and Warren Harding. It's fine with me. *[Laughter]* I don't—put some Republican's name on it. I don't care. Just do it, because it's the right thing to do for the seniors of this country.

So I would just implore you, help us pass this. Write to your United States Senators. Tell them it's not a partisan issue. Tell them what life is like. Tell them it's not right for seniors in Ohio to pay 30 to 50 percent more for medicine than seniors in Canada pay for the same medicine that's made in America in the first place. Tell them it's not right for you to need something you can't have, so you get sick, but then when you show up at the emergency room, it gets paid for.

We can afford this. Everybody in America has worked hard for it. We've got this budget in good shape. We can make a commitment to our future. If you think this is necessary now, imagine what it's going to be like when the number of seniors doubles in 30 years.

That's the last point I want to leave you with. Look how many seniors there are in Cleveland today. In 30 years, the number of people over 65 will double, and Donna Shalala and I hope to be among them. *[Laughter]* And you think about it. And then the average age in America will be well over 80.

Now, if we have to take care of all these people by waiting until they get sick and they go to the hospital, instead of worried about hospitals closing, 30 years from now you'll worry about the city going bankrupt because everybody will be in the hospital. We've got to be healthier. We've got to keep people healthy. We need to keep them playing tennis, like Lawyer Shalala there, but we also need to be able to give people medication to keep them out of the hospital and to manage people in a way that will maximize their health. This will be a huge issue.

So I implore you, this country—this is the first time we've been in shape to do this in 35 years. We can do this now. And we can do it now and take care of the future. We can help the seniors of today and take a great burden off of tomorrow. But we need your help to do it.

Again, I implore you, talk to your Members of Congress, talk to your Senators. Tell them it's not a partisan issue; it's an American issue. It's a human issue, and it's a smart thing to do.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. in the Louis Stokes Wing of the City Public Library. In his remarks, he referred to Wanda Golias, who introduced the President; Andrew Venable, Jr., director, City Public Library; former Representative Louis Stokes; Edna Shalala, mother of Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala; Sandy Alomar, Jr., catcher, Cleveland Indians; 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI, and her mother, Veronica McQueen; and Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

## Statement on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

March 13, 2000

On March 12, 1999, in Independence, Missouri, the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. One year ago, America became safer, NATO became stronger, and Europe more stable and united.

Today we take the opportunity to reaffirm that the first new members of NATO shall

not be the last. From the Baltic Sea to the Balkans, in the heart of Europe, and wherever NATO's partners are found, there are many countries that share our democratic values and our determination to defend them. As they become able to meet the responsibilities of NATO membership and to contribute to the security of the transatlantic area, we will support their aspirations to become our Allies.

NATO is erasing arbitrary lines of division across Europe. That is essential if we are to meet our goal, shared by our administration and a broad bipartisan coalition, of a Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in history. We will also continue to deepen our partnership with Russia and Ukraine, who play essential roles in the new Europe.

At the NATO Summit in Washington in April 1999, the Allies laid out a roadmap to membership. We are helping aspiring allies intensify their participation in the Partnership For Peace, encouraging them to follow Membership Action Plans to achieve greater inter-operability with NATO, and engaging with them in a full set of consultations and cooperative measures. In these ways, aspiring countries are demonstrating their commitment to closer ties with NATO and preparing for possible membership in the Alliance. They are also embracing economic and political reforms as well as defense policies that strengthen their democracies and contribute to peace and security in Europe. We urge them to continue pursuing their Membership Action Plans, the surest path to joining NATO, with even greater dedication in the months ahead.

On this occasion, we thank our Allies, new and old, for working with us to make sure NATO does in the next half century what it has done in the last: unite our strength to deter war and defend our common interests. NATO's door is open to those who will help us do that in the future.

## **Notice—Continuation of Iran Emergency**

*March 13, 2000*

On March 15, 1995, by Executive Order 12957, I declared a national emergency with respect to Iran pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701–1706) to deal with the threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States constituted by the actions and policies of the Government of Iran, including its support for international terrorism, efforts to undermine the Middle East peace process, and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. On May 6, 1995, I issued Executive Order 12959 imposing more comprehensive sanctions to further respond to this threat, and on August 19, 1997, I issued Executive Order 13059 consolidating and clarifying these previous orders. The last notice of continuation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 12, 1999.

Because the actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, the national emergency declared on March 15, 1995, must continue in effect beyond March 15, 2000. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing the national emergency with respect to Iran. Because the emergency declared by Executive Order 12957 constitutes an emergency separate from that declared on November 14, 1979, by Executive Order 12170, this renewal is distinct from the emergency renewal of November 1999. This notice shall be published in the *Federal Register* and transmitted to the Congress.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
March 13, 2000.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register,  
12:18 p.m., March 13, 2000]

NOTE: This notice was published in the *Federal Register* on March 14.

**Letter to Congressional Leaders on Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Iran**

March 13, 2000

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent the enclosed notice, stating that the national emergency declared with respect to Iran on March 15, 1995, pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701–1706) is to continue in effect beyond March 15, 2000, to the *Federal Register* for publication. This emergency is separate from that declared on November 14, 1979, in connection with the Iranian hostage crisis and therefore requires separate renewal of emergency authorities. The last notice of continuation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 12, 1999.

The factors that led me to declare a national emergency with respect to Iran on March 15, 1995, have not been resolved. The actions and policies of the Government of Iran, including support for international terrorism, its efforts to undermine the Middle East peace process, and its acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them, continue to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States.

Sincerely,

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate.

**Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Chicago, Illinois**

March 13, 2000

Thank you very much. And thank you all for being here. I'm sure the fire marshal is nervous. [Laughter] You're all packed in here, and I'm very glad to see you.

I want to thank—Jan, thank you for that wonderful, wonderful introduction and for your commitment to handgun safety and to keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and children. Thank you, Senator Durbin. Thank you, Congressman Blagojevich. Thank you, Mayor Rendell and Janice Griffin and Joe Cari.

I want to thank—I asked Phil and Karen Stefani to come up here because we're in their wonderful place. This is the 20th anniversary of the opening of their restaurant. So let's give them a big hand, the Stefanis. Thank you very much. [Applause] They have been wonderful friends to me and to Hillary, and I'm very grateful to them, and I thank them again.

I will be brief, but I want to, first of all, thank you so much for being here and for your contributions. I want to thank the people of Illinois for being so wonderful to me and to Hillary and the Vice President and Tipper, for voting for me overwhelmingly in the '92 primary, and giving us your electoral votes in '92 and '96. I thank you for that.

You know, I had a lot of advantages, running for President, in Illinois. I had Hillary. [Laughter] I had wonderful friends here in Chicago. I had David Wilhelm as my campaign chairman. I had served as the chairman of the Lower Mississippi Delta Commission, which included all the countries in southern Illinois, and I'd spent a lot of time there. I was from Arkansas, and there's an enormous number of African-Americans in Chicago from Arkansas, and that was a big help. Something which stunned my opponents in '92, and they found out, only too late. [Laughter] So I've had a lot of advantages here. And Illinois has been so good to me. Chicago has been so good to me. And I have now, Bill Daley, who is making a wonderful Secretary of Commerce and doing you proud every day.



But I want to talk to you tonight about where we go from here and why you came here. I'm grateful that I've had the chance to serve as President, and I'm grateful for those of you who said tonight going through the line you wish I could serve a little more. This is the first election in decades I haven't been a candidate. Most days I'm okay with it. *[Laughter]* So I come tonight to say to you, as your President, as a fellow citizen, as somebody who is profoundly grateful for how good you've been to me, we have worked a long time to turn this country around, to get the economy growing, to get the poverty rate down, to get the welfare rolls down and the crime rate down, to get people coming together and moving forward, to make America a respected force for peace and freedom around the world—several of you talked about my upcoming trip to India and Pakistan tonight.

And this election gives us a chance to build the future of our dreams for our children. It is very important. We have a chance, now, because the unemployment rate's at a 30-year low, because we've got back-to-back surpluses for the first time in 42 years, to give all our children the education they deserve; to provide health insurance for low income working children and their parents; to provide the kind of tax relief that would enable every family to be able to tell their children when they're young, if you stay in school and do your lessons, no matter how poor we are, you can still go on to college; to prove that we can grow the economy and improve the environment at the same time; to meet the big challenges out there.

We can get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835. We can save Social Security before the baby boomers retire. I'm the oldest of the baby boomers, and I can tell you that everybody in my generation, the people who I grew up with at home, most of whom have very modest incomes, they're very worried that when we all retire and there are only two people working for every one person on Social Security, that we'll impose a burden on our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren.

We can get rid of that burden right now. We can take Social Security out beyond the lifespan of the baby boom generation. We

can lengthen Medicare. We can add a prescription drug benefit, which should have been there all along, so that our seniors who can't afford their medicine will be able to afford it. We can do these things.

And we can make America a safer place. You know, it's amazing to me that I get in these tussles with the NRA. They've been after me for a decade now. *[Laughter]* You know, I once got a lifetime membership to the NRA—I think it's been revoked now—*[laughter]*—because I worked with them when they were trying to educate children to go hunting without hurting themselves, when they were trying to help me solve a lot of other problems. But now their main mission in life seems to be to stop any kind of collective action that will help us to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children.

You know, we do this in all kinds of other ways. Most of us are safe drivers, but we still don't object to getting a driver's license or having to wear our seatbelts. Most of us are not terrorists, but we don't object to going through those metal detectors at airports. In fact, we kind of like them now because we think they keep us alive. But at some inconvenience, especially if you've got something that jangles in your pants and you keep—you know, your money clip keeps setting it off and you go through four or five—but we do it, right, because it makes us a safer country.

Now, their position is that guns are the only thing that we should impose no inconvenience on the law-abiding majority to protect us from the law-breaking minority or the dangerous people.

They said when we passed the Brady bill, we'd just interfere with hunters' rights and wouldn't get any criminals. There hasn't been a hunter missed a day in the deer woods, but we kept 500,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns, and a lot of people are alive in this country because of that.

And the same with the assault weapons ban. I really regret that the NRA leader—I guess he was frustrated, and sometimes when you don't have a defense for your position, the best thing to do is just attack your opponent, and that's what he did. But you

know, it's pretty hard for me to take somebody saying I really want a certain level of killing in America so I can beat up on the NRA. You can say that on television, but I sat with the mother and the stepfather of that beautiful little 6-year-old girl that was killed in Michigan, and I didn't like that.

I went and met with the families that lost their children at Columbine, out in Springfield, Oregon, and Jonesboro, Arkansas. I didn't like that. I've met with a lot of people who died from violence or whose loved ones died from violence. I'm just trying to keep more people alive. And I'm not interested in fighting with anybody, but I'm interested in fighting for this young man's future with his "No Guns" sign here.

And I was thinking today, coming into Chicago, one of the most meaningful days I ever had here was out in one of your neighborhoods, near a rehab unit where we had, I don't know, a half dozen, maybe a dozen people who were wounded severely by gun violence. And that day there was a Chicago police officer who had done 2 tours in Vietnam and survived them without a scratch and had 11 bullets in his body because he'd been assaulted doing his job as a law enforcement officer.

And the police and the gun safety groups gave me a beautiful plaque, a very heavy plaque with a model of Abraham Lincoln that was the same used for the penny. And it's still in my office in the White House. If you came there, you could see it today. And I keep it to remember all those young people I saw in wheelchairs, paralyzed for life, who shouldn't have been there.

And I say that because there are big stakes here. And there are big differences between what the House and Senate Democrats would do and what their Republican counterparts would do. There are big differences between what Vice President Gore and Governor Bush would do. And I don't feel the need to attack them the way they attack us. I think they actually believe what they say. I just think they're wrong.

And I think that—you know, if we gave the kind of tax cut that the Republicans have embraced, starting with their nominee, we couldn't save Social Security; we couldn't save Medicare; we couldn't invest in edu-

cation; and we'd start running deficits again. And I think you like it when we pay down the debt and these interest rates are low, and you can buy cars and homes and keep borrowing money and keep this economy going. And we still have the money to invest in schools and education and trying to help people work their way out of poverty.

There are real differences on these gun safety issues. I don't think that anybody ought to sell a handgun without a child safety lock on it. I don't think that we ought to import these big ammunition clips that allow you to convert weapons into assault weapons when we've banned them here at home. And I don't think that we ought to require background checks if you go buy a handgun in a gun store, and then if you show up at a gun show or an urban flea market, you can get out of the background checks. And I think Americans ought to be willing to undergo a certain amount of inconvenience, if they're law-abiding people buying a gun at a gun show or an urban flea market, to wait a day or so until this background check is done. And if it has to be 3 days because the records aren't there, it's over the weekend, I think that's okay, too. And I don't think people ought to be bellyaching about that. If it saves the life of one child, it is worth it—it is worth it.

So what I want you to do is to tell people these things. If they ask you, why did you go last night, tell them that "I went because this country is in better shape than it was 7 years ago. They had good ideas, and they turned out to be right. I went because, more important, because they've got a better plan for the future."

And the last thing I want to say is this. A week ago yesterday I had one of the great days in my life. I got to go to Selma, Alabama, for the 35th anniversary of the voting rights march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. And I was thinking—I see all these young people here—I was thinking, when I was a young man in college, people were still being killed for the right to vote. Whites and blacks marching together in the South lost their lives so that everybody could vote—in my adult lifetime. And I thought about what a long way we have come since 1965.

In 1964, when I finished high school, we were sad because President Kennedy had been killed, but the country united behind Lyndon Johnson. We thought we would have an economy that would go on forever. We thought we would solve the civil rights problems through the Congress. We thought we would win the cold war without dividing the country. We thought things would be just hunky-dory.

Within a year, people were getting killed at Selma. Within 2 years, we had riots in the street. Within 4 years, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were dead, and Lyndon Johnson couldn't run for reelection, and the country was split right down the middle over the war. And within a few months, we had elected a President on a campaign of "us" against "them," called the Silent Majority. Do you remember that? If you weren't in the Silent Majority you were, by definition, in the loud minority. That's what I was in. [Laughter] And we've been "us-ing" and "them-ing" ourselves to death for 30-something years now. [Laughter]

And by the way, that's when we had the longest economic expansion in history until this one. And soon after that election, expansion disappeared. And I say that because it is important that you not let the American people, the people of Illinois, the people of Chicago, be casual about this election. Because 35 years ago, when we had the same sort of economy by those terms in those years, we thought it would just go on forever, and we thought everything was going to be hunky-dory, and the wheels ran off.

And I have waited as an American citizen for 35 years to give our people the chance to build one America and to build the future of our dreams. That's what I've been working for these whole 7 years. I knew we could never get it all done in my term of service, but I knew if we could turn America around, if we could point America in the right direction, if we could keep going and unleash the energies of all of our people, we could actually build one country and deal with these big challenges.

Now, that's what this election is about. It is very important. You cannot assume any good thing that is happening today is on automatic. Martin Luther King said, "Progress

does not roll along on the wheels of inevitability. It is brought by people who are willing to work hard, to be co-workers with God."

You have to work. You have to work. You've got a Presidential nominee you can be proud of. You've got a Senator, you've got Members of Congress you can be proud of. This is worth fighting for. When people ask you tomorrow why you were here—don't even wait for them to ask—tell them why you came. [Laughter] Tell them the country's better off than it was 7 years ago. Tell them we've got better ideas for the future. Tell them you have got the chance of a lifetime to build the future of our dreams for our children, and you are determined to do it, and you know that the best way to do it is to support the Democrats in November.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:10 p.m. at Stefani's Restaurant at a dinner for the Women's Leadership Forum and the Saxophone Club. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Janice D. Schakowsky; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, and Joseph A. Cari, Jr., finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Janice Griffin, national chair, Women's Leadership Forum; dinner hosts Phil and Karen Stefani; Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association, who appeared March 12 on ABC's "This Week"; Veronica and Michael McQueen, mother and stepfather of 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

### **Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Lincolnwood, Illinois**

*March 13, 2000*

Thank you very much. Mike, I loved that introduction, but it sounds suspiciously like a eulogy, you know? [Laughter]

I was in Cleveland today, before I came here, and I reminded the crowd there that the last time I had come to Cleveland was to say goodbye to former Representative Lou Stokes, who was retiring from the Congress. And we went to an elementary school in his district, where there were a lot of young AmeriCorps volunteers, like the ones who

met me in Chicago tonight when I got off the plane. And they were serving in their communities, helping kids. They were teaching all these kids at this school to learn to read and kind of navigate their way in the world.

And I got down—I started with the oldest kids, and I got down to the 6-year-olds, and I’m shaking hands with all these 6-year-old kids. And this little kid looked way up at me, and he said, “Are you really the President?” [Laughter] And I said, “Yes, I am.” He said, “But you’re not dead yet.” [Laughter] And I realized that for him, Presidents were George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and a part of the job description was you had to be deceased. And when people talk about me the way Mike did, I have to pinch myself and say, “I’m still here.” [Laughter] But I loved it.

I want to thank Mike and Pat for having us in their beautiful home, and I want to thank them. And Jim, thank you for the work you did on this event tonight. And so many of you have been so good to me and to the Democratic Party. My friend Ed Rendell—I asked him to take this part-time job when he retired as mayor of Philadelphia, and he’s wearing himself out at it. And thank you, Senator Durbin, for being here. Yes, he’s doing a great job. Give him a hand. [Applause] I want to thank Lou Weisbach and Joe Cari for the work they’re doing to help our party. And thank you all for coming.

I know we’re going to have a little time for questions when I finish, so I’ll try to be brief. But I want to say a few things. First of all, I am profoundly grateful to the people of Chicago and the people of Illinois for the support that they have given to me and Hillary and Al and Tipper Gore, starting in December of ’91, when I began my campaign here in earnest, through the Democratic primary in ’92, through two great elections and all of Illinois’ electoral votes. And I am very grateful.

Secondly, I want to thank you, those of you, a large number of you in this room, who have already helped my wife in her quest to join Dick Durbin in the U.S. Senate. I thank you for that.

Thirdly, I want to thank Mike Cherry for all those ties. [Laughter] That would be—

that’s a good reason—if I could run for a third term, I would, just to get 4 more years of ties from Mike Cherry. I was—one wag that works in the White House asked me the other day, he said, “What are you going to do when you’re not President anymore and you’ll have to start buying your own ties? You’ll be bankrupt in no time, you know.” He’s spoiled me.

The second thing I want to say to you is that what Mike said about the progress that our country has made over the last 7 years is very important to me. But it really only matters insofar as it’s evidence of what we can and should do in the future. After all, that’s what you hired me to do. And I ran for President because I thought Washington was off on the wrong track, and they were just up there fighting with each other and divided among themselves, and the way people even talked about issues and politics and real life in Washington bore no relationship to what I had tried to do for many years as Governor of my own State.

So I thank you for that. But the important thing is the future. Some of you heard me tell this story, but I used to go out to the State Fair in Arkansas every year on a day I’d have Governor’s Day, and I’d just sit there and meet with whoever showed up. In 1990—1989, late ’89—I was trying to decide whether to run for a fifth term as Governor in 1990. And this old boy in overalls showed up, about 70 years old, and he said, “Well, Bill, are you going to run again?” And I said, “Well, I don’t know. If I do, will you vote for me?” He said, “I guess so, I always have.” And I said, “Well, aren’t you sick of me after all these years?” And he said, “No, I’m not, but everybody else I know is.” [Laughter] I said, “But don’t you think I’ve done a good job?” He said, “Well, sure you have, but that’s what we pay you to do.” He said, “You collect a paycheck every 2 weeks.” It was a healthy little reminder that elections are always about tomorrow. That’s why we’re still around here after over 200 years.

And I have tried to give this country a relentless focus on the future and a way of getting there together. I believe everybody matters; everyone should have a chance. I believe everyone has a responsible role to play. I believe we all do better when we help each

other. Simple ideas, and the country is better off than it was 7 years ago. And for that I'm grateful.

But we've got a lot of work to do this year. We've got a profoundly important vote on whether to approve China's entry to the World Trade Organization and acquire massive access to their markets, which we don't have now. We're trying to raise the minimum wage for workers that are still working 40 hours a week and living on the edge of poverty. We're trying to get tax deductibility to middle class parents for the cost of college tuition.

We're trying to get seniors on Medicare the option of buying prescription drug coverage. When we know three out of five seniors in this country, in spite of all our work, still can't afford the medicine they need. We're trying to get a tax break for people who take care of their elderly or disabled relatives at home, because it's such an expensive but lonely choice, and I think they need our help.

We're trying to modernize our schools by repairing and building thousands of them and making sure they're all hooked up to the Internet and giving all the troubled kids in this country access to after-school programs. We've got a big agenda. And it's very important that we continue to build on the work of the last 7 years in this year, to keep moving, relentlessly forward.

And the last thing I'd like to say about all this is it's also very important that we make the right decisions in this election year. Several of you mentioned today the almost incredible attack that the leader of the NRA leveled on me, saying that I actually wanted a bunch of these kids to die so we'd have a reason to inconvenience gun owners. And you know, I don't want to get into a big personal shouting match about a comment that is clearly ridiculous. What I want you to understand is, there will be a lot of shouting and name-calling and elbowing in this election. There always is. But what I want you to understand is that underneath all that shouting and name-calling, notwithstanding what Mayor Rendell said, I don't think it's necessary to believe that Governor Bush is a bad human being to believe he shouldn't be President. I don't believe it's necessary

to believe that the Republicans in the House and Senate are bad people to believe that they shouldn't be in the majority.

And I have to tell you, my experience in politics—I'm not running for anything. I'm just telling you, I've been in this business a long time. Most of the people that I have known in both parties worked harder than they got credit for and were more honest than people believed they were and did the best they could day-in, day-out.

This election is about people who honestly have different views about the way to the future. And what I hope you'll tell people is, it's not like we don't have a test here. We tested their way, and we tested our way. And now you've got a choice, because in the election of 2000, the Vice President says we ought to keep paying down the debt; save enough money to save Social Security and Medicare, so when the baby boomers retire they don't bankrupt their kids and their ability to raise their grandkids; and give the rest of it, after we invest in education and health care, to the taxpayers in a tax cut we can afford.

And Governor Bush says we ought to have one even bigger than the one I vetoed last year, which means we can't guarantee the security of Social Security and Medicare or invest in education, or if we try to, we're going to go back to running big deficits.

Now, we tried it their way, and we tried it our way. And you have to decide whether you think it was better in '91 and '92, or it was better in '99 and 2000. But you don't have to think they're bad people. This is an honest difference of opinion.

We believe that it is not unbearable to ask legitimate hunters and sports people in this country to agree that all handguns ought to have child trigger locks; that the Brady background checks we do at gun shows ought to be done—I mean, at gun stores ought to be done at gun shows and urban flea markets; that since we banned assault weapons, we shouldn't let people get around it by importing these big ammunition clips. And they disagree. It's an honest disagreement. I think we're right and they're wrong.

We've got a 25-year low in crime rate, 30-year low in the gun death rate, half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers haven't gotten

handguns because we started doing these background checks. And we have to choose.

You know, I believe we ought to provide more health insurance for lower income working people and their kids. I think it would be good for the hospitals, too, that are strapped for money. And we have a proposal on that. I believe we can grow the economy and improve the environment, and so does our Vice President. I think experience matters, and there's no question, even the people that don't agree with anything I've done and don't agree with anything he's done will admit that Al Gore has been the most influential Vice President in the history, that's had the biggest impact over the largest number of issues, in the history of the Republic. Now, that's a fact.

That's not something to debate. And I guess it's self-serving for me to say because the President has to okay that. But I never could figure out why Presidents would want Vice Presidents if they didn't want to put them to work. Never made any sense to me. *[Laughter]* And I could never figure out why anybody would want to be Vice President if they didn't want to get up and go to work every day. And fortunately, I found a fellow workaholic who did a fabulous job.

You know, Dick Durbin—I believe he did the right thing to try to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco. I think he did the right thing—and to protect them from guns. Now, I believe—and I could go on and on and on. So what I want to say to you is, I hope that even though—I think I've done a pretty good job of bringing this country together, not such a good job of bringing Washington together. That may be something beyond human powers. *[Laughter]*

But I hope that we Democrats this year will go out there and run an aggressive campaign, not shy from debates, don't mind a fight, but make it about the American people. You know, voters are not stupid. They know, when politicians are throwing off on each other, they're trying to help themselves; they're not interested in them. But when they're fighting about issues, they can relate to that, because that has to do with how the rest of us live.

And when people ask you why you came tonight, say, "Look, I came because the

country's better off than it was 7 years ago. They had some good ideas, and they turned out to be right. I came because I support what we're trying to do this year. And I came because this is a big, big election."

And let me just close with this thought. I have spent a lot of time trying to build what I call one America, to bring people together across racial and ethnic and religious lines, fight against hate crimes and fight for the "Employment Nondiscrimination Act," and to be a force for reconciling conflicts around the world.

And if God came to me tonight and said, "Well, I'm sorry, you can't finish your term. You've got to finish tomorrow. You're history. And I'm no genie, I'm not going to give you three wishes, but I'll give you one," I would wish for America to be one nation, one united country, where people celebrated our differences but revered our common humanity even more, because I don't think we'll be able to do good around the world unless we are good at home.

And that goes to our political differences as well. I had more fun in the State of the Union watching the Republicans and the Democrats when I told them that according to all the research, we were all genetically 99.9 percent the same. *[Laughter]* And I could tell they both were grievously discomfited by that statistic. *[Laughter]* But it's true.

I've now got this—last year one of the great experiences I had was Neil Armstrong came to see me with two of his astronaut partners to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Moon landing. And he brought me this vacuum-packed Moon rock, which I now have on the table right in front of the chairs in the Oval Office. You know when you all see the pictures of the Oval Office on television? There's two chairs and two couches, this big table.

Well, you notice the next time you see it on television, there's this vacuum-packed Moon rock. And when people come in and they talk and they get real angry—like, we had this conference on gun safety the other day, and they got all agitated because I was pushing them to do this bill, and they get angry and mad. I stop everybody, and I say, "Chill out. Look at that rock. You see that

rock? That rock is 3.6 billion years old. We are all just passing through, and we need to do the best we can right now." I want this campaign to be vigorous and hard-fought, but it ought to be a happy time. But you ought to be dead serious about it.

The only other point I want to make is one that's kind of heavy on me now because a week ago yesterday I got to go to Selma and march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge for the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when John Lewis and Hosea Williams and others were beaten badly trying to march to Montgomery to campaign for voting rights.

As a southerner, it was one of the great moments of my life, with John Lewis, who's one of my true heroes. But here's what I want to say to you about it. I've been thinking a lot about the sixties lately, because in February we had the longest economic expansion in history. Now, before we broke the record, the record was held by the decade of the sixties, 1961 through 1969. And I see a lot of young people here tonight. I was a high school senior in 1964, in the middle of this vast expansion. And we thought the economy would have high growth, low unemployment, low inflation forever.

And when I graduated from high school, the country was getting over the grief of President Kennedy and honored that President Johnson was trying to pass all the civil rights legislation through Congress. And we thought all of our racial problems would be fixed by laws passed through Congress. And we thought we would win the cold war against communism without having the country divided. That's what we thought was going to happen.

And we were all very—not just the kids, like me, the grownups—we just took it for granted, this is what was going to happen. A year later, Selma occurred. And whites and blacks died in the sixties, just 35 years ago, for the right to vote. A year later, '66, we had riots in the streets. Then in 1968, when I was a senior in college, Robert Kennedy was killed 2 days before I graduated. Martin Luther King was killed 2 months before I graduated. Nine weeks before I graduated, Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for President again. The country was split right down the middle over the Vietnam war.

A few weeks later, Mr. Nixon was elected President on a divisive campaign, that he represented the Silent Majority, which meant the rest of us were in the loud minority. And it was a campaign of "us" against "them"—were you an "us" or "them"? And we've been "us-ing" and "them-ing" ever since. And then a few weeks after that, this vaunted economic expansion came to an end, and it was over.

And what I want all of you to say—a lot of you brought your children here tonight. Forget about me being President. As an American citizen, I have waited 35 years for my country to be in a position to build a future of our dreams for our children together—35 years. And I thought about it walking over that bridge and having John Lewis tell me what it was like when he finally realized he was going to get his brains beat out. And I thought about how easily things can change and how easily we can be lulled into a sense of complacency.

I've worked as hard as I could for 7 years to turn this country around. I'm proud of what's happened. But believe me, nothing has happened that can hold a candle to what we could do together now that we have good, basic conditions. What has happened is nothing compared to what we can do.

And that's what I want you to think about. America is always about tomorrow. And those of you who have been blessed enough in this life and this economy to be able to afford to come to this dinner tonight—I'm glad; I like that. But you wouldn't be here, you'd be at somebody else's dinner if you didn't also think that the people that served your food ought to make a decent living and ought to be able to have health care and their kids ought to be able to go to good schools and that we're all going to do better if we go forward together. If you didn't believe that, you'd be at somebody else's dinner tonight.

So I'm telling you, I'm glad you're here. I thank you for helping our party. I thank you, those of you who have helped Hillary, those of you who have helped the Vice President. I thank you for all that. But the fight is still ahead of us. And don't forget this. America is always about tomorrow. And I watched it once before in my lifetime; it can get away from you before you know it. This

is a solemn responsibility we have and an enormous chance. Let's make the most of it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Mike and Pat Cherry, dinner hosts, and Jim Levin, president, JHL Enterprises, dinner cohost; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, and Joseph A. Cari, Jr., finance cochair, Democratic National Committee; Lou Weisbach, chief executive officer, HA-LO Industries, Inc.; Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin, and Michael Collins; civil rights activist Hosea Williams; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; and Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

### Remarks on Presenting the National Medals of Science and Technology March 14, 2000

**The President.** Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you and welcome to the White House. Thank you, Secretary Daley, and thank you, Dr. Lane, for your leadership. Secretary Shalala, Dr. Colwell, Representative Nick Smith, Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson, thank you for your support of science and technology in the United States Congress, across party lines. We welcome Sir Christopher Meyer, the British Ambassador to the United States, here to be with us today.

Every year I look forward to this day. I always learn something from the work of the honorees. Some of you I know personally; others, I've read your books. Some of you, I'm still trying to grasp the implications of what it is I'm supposed to understand and don't quite yet. [Laughter] But this has been—I must say, one of the great personal joys of being President for me has been the opportunity that I've had to be involved with people who are pushing the frontiers of science and technology and to study subjects that I haven't really thought seriously about since I was in my late teens. And I thank you for that.

When Congress minted America's first coin in 1792, one of the mottos was "Liberty, Parent of Science and Industry." Very few of those coins survived, but the Smithsonian

has lent us one today. I actually have one. It's worth \$300,000. [Laughter] Not enough to turn the head of a 25-year-old .com executive—[laughter]—but to a President, it's real money. [Laughter] And I thought you might like to see it because it embodies a commitment that was deep in the consciousness of Thomas Jefferson and many of our other Founders. And we could put the same inscription on your medals today.

You have used your freedom to ask and answer some of the greatest questions of our time. Each of you has been a brilliant innovator, and more, breaking down barriers between disciplines, broadening the frontiers of knowledge, bringing the products of pure research into everyday lives of millions of people, helping to educate the next generation of inventors and innovators.

For this, America and, indeed, the entire world is in your debt. It is terribly important that we continue to open the world of science to every American. The entire store of human knowledge is now doubling every 5 years. In just the 8 years since I first presented these medals, think about what has occurred. In 1993 no one's computer had a zip drive or a Pentium chip; there were only 50 sites on the World Wide Web, amazing, January of 1993. Today, there are about 50 million. In 1993 cloning animals was still science fiction. But Dolly the sheep would be born just 4 years later. Since 1993, we've sent robots to rove on Mars, created prototype cars that get 70 to 80 miles a gallon, invented Palm Pilots that put the Internet on our belts and lead to the increasing nightmares of a busy life. [Laughter]

The work that you and your colleagues have done has changed everything about our lives. It has brought us to the threshold of a new scientific voyage that promises to change everything all over again.

Perhaps no science today is more compelling than the effort to decipher the human genome, the string of 3 billion letters that make up our genes. In my lifetime, we'll go from knowing almost nothing about how our genes work to enlisting genes in the struggle to prevent and cure illness. This will be the scientific breakthrough of the century, perhaps of all time. We have a profound responsibility to ensure that the life-saving benefits



of any cutting-edge research are available to all human beings.

Today, we take a major step in that direction by pledging to lead a global effort to make the raw data from DNA sequencing available to scientists everywhere to benefit people everywhere. To this end, I am pleased to announce a groundbreaking agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom, one which I reconfirmed just a few hours ago in a conversation with Prime Minister Blair and one which brings the distinguished British Ambassador here today.

This agreement says in the strongest possible terms our genome, the book in which all human life is written, belongs to every member of the human race. Already the Human Genome Project, funded by the United States and the United Kingdom, requires its grant recipients to make the sequences they discover publicly available within 24 hours. I urge all other nations, scientists, and corporations to adopt this policy and honor its spirit. We must ensure that the profits of human genome research are measured not in dollars but in the betterment of human life. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Already, we can isolate genes that cause Parkinson's disease and some forms of cancer, as well as a genetic variation that seems to protect its carriers from AIDS. Next month the Department of Energy's Joint Genome Project will complete DNA sequences for three more chromosomes whose genes play roles in more than 150 diseases, from leukemia to kidney disease to schizophrenia. And those are just the ones we know about.

What we don't know is how these genes affect the process of disease and how they might be used to prevent or to cure it. Right now, we are Benjamin Franklin with electricity and a kite, not Thomas Edison with a usable light bulb.

As we take the next step and use this information to develop therapies and medicines, private companies have a major role. By making the raw data publicly available, companies can promote competition and innovation and spur the pace of scientific advance. They need incentives to throw their top minds into expensive research ahead. They need patent protection for their discoveries and the prospect of marketing them successfully, and it

is in the Government's interest to see that they get it.

But as scientists race to decipher our genetic alphabet, we need to think now about the future and see clearly that, in science and technology, the future lies in openness. We should recognize that access to the raw data and responsible use of patents and licensing is the most sensible way to build a sustainable market for genetic medicine. Above all, we should recognize that this is a fundamental challenge to our common humanity and that keeping our genetic code accessible is the right thing to do.

We should also remember that, like the Internet, supercomputers, and so many other scientific advances, our ability to read our genetic alphabet grew from decades of research that began with Government funding. Every American has an investment in unlocking the human genome, and all Americans should be proud of their investment in this and other frontiers of science.

I thank all of you for all you have done to build international and national support for American investment in science and technology. I am grateful that this administration has had the opportunity to increase our funding for civilian research every year and that we have requested an unprecedented increase this year, in areas from nanotechnology to clean energy to space exploration.

As the new century opens, we are setting out on a new voyage of discovery, not just into human cells but into the human heart. We cannot know what lies ahead. Each new discovery presents even more new questions. What is the purpose of the 97 percent of our genetic makeup whose function we don't know? What will we find in the genes left to identify? How will we make sure the benefits of genetic research are widely and fairly shared? How will we make sure that millions of Americans living longer lives also live better and more fulfilling ones?

Almost 200 years ago, Lewis and Clark set out on a voyage of discovery that was planned in this room, where Thomas Jefferson and Meriwether Lewis laid out maps on tables, right where you're sitting and, though it would be politically incorrect today, tromped around on animal skins on the floor. *[Laughter]* That discovery would not only map the

contours of our continent, but expand forever the frontier of our national imagination.

Before setting out, when Meriwether Lewis was here in the East Room with Thomas Jefferson, poring over maps and sharing the lessons in natural science, he actually lived on the south side of this room, in two small rooms that Thomas Jefferson had constructed in this big room for him. I must say today, I wish I could ask all of you to do the same. *[Laughter]* I always feel that when I do this, the wrong person is talking. I wish we could hear from all of you today.

One of the things that I wish I could do a better job of as President is sparking the interest and understanding of every single citizen in the work you do—of everyone's ability to see how profoundly significant what goes on in your labs and in your minds is to their future. I do think the American people are coming a long way on that, and I tried to talk in the State of the Union in ways that would help. I also try to think of little ways to illustrate how you are changing our conception of the most basic things: what is big and what is small; what is long and what is short. Dr. Lane has actually given me a primer of what nanotechnology is, and I can carry on a fairly meaningful subject about something that is totally unfathomable to me. *[Laughter]*

And last year, Neil Armstrong and his colleagues came back to the White House to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his walk on the Moon. And while he did it, as a part of the ceremony, he gave me—just on loan—a vacuum-packed Moon rock which, if you see the photographs now of the Oval Office with the two chairs and the couches and the table in between, the Moon rock is now visible to the world that sees it.

And when Members of Congress and others come in and get all heated up and angry over some issue, I often call a time out, and I say, "Wait a minute. See that rock? It came off the Moon. It's 3.6 billion years old. We're all just passing through. Chill out." *[Laughter]* It works every time. *[Laughter]* So there's a practical gain I got from scientific advance. *[Laughter]*

There are many other things that have happened that have enriched our lives. I have

to acknowledge the presence here of my good friend Stevie Wonder, who has had a lot to do with improving musical technology, and is obviously interested in some of the scientific developments now going on, which might restore sight to people and other movements to people who have suffered debilitating paralysis and other things. And we thank you, Stevie, for being here today. Thank you.

As our honorees receive their medals, we thank them; all of us thank them for the way they have changed the way we view our planet and broadened infinitely the ways we gather and store knowledge. You are part of an unbroken chain from Lewis and Jefferson to Edison and Einstein, from the cotton gin to the space shuttle, from a vaccine for polio to the mysteries of DNA. I thank each of you for what you have done to change our world and to enrich our minds, our imaginations, and our hearts.

And I think—I learned right before I came in here that it is infinitely appropriate that you are receiving these awards on Albert Einstein's birthday. So thank you very much. Congratulations.

Commander, please read the citations.

*[At this point, Comdr. Michael M. Gilday, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals.]*

**The President.** Now, ladies and gentlemen, I want to just say two things in closing. First of all, we saw again today another triumph of the scientific method. After two failures, all the other honorees took off their glasses on their own. *[Laughter]* It was truly amazing.

This has been a wonderful day. I'd like to invite all of you to join us in the State Dining Room for a reception in honor of the award recipients.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin, and Michael Collins; and musician Stevie Wonder.

### **Joint Statement by President Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom**

*March 14, 2000*

In the last decade of the twentieth century, scientists from around the world initiated one of the most significant scientific projects of all time: to determine the DNA sequence of the entire human genome, the human genetic blueprint. Progressing ahead of schedule, human genome research is rapidly advancing our understanding of the causes of human disease and will serve as the foundation for development of a new generation of effective treatments, preventions, and cures.

To realize the full promise of this research, raw fundamental data on the human genome, including the human DNA sequence and its variations, should be made freely available to scientists everywhere. Unencumbered access to this information will promote discoveries that will reduce the burden of disease, improve health around the world, and enhance the quality of life for all humankind. Intellectual property protection for gene-based inventions will also play an important role in stimulating the development of important new health care products.

We applaud the decision by scientists working on the Human Genome Project to release raw fundamental information about the human DNA sequence and its variants rapidly into the public domain, and we commend other scientists around the world to adopt this policy.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

### **Statement on Signing the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000**

*March 14, 2000*

Today I have signed into law H.R. 1883, the "Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000."

I fully share the Congress's objective of promoting nonproliferation and combating Iran's efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missile delivery systems. This issue remains at the top of the agenda with Russia as well as with other countries whose companies may be providing

such assistance to Iran. In the case of Russian entities' cooperation with Iran, we have imposed penalties ten times in the past and stand ready to apply them again whenever necessary.

The expansive reporting requirements in this bill in many ways duplicate existing laws, and my Administration will work with the Congress to rationalize these overlapping reporting requirements. We will also seek to rationalize the reporting requirements relating to certain transfers in instances where those transfers are legal under the applicable foreign laws and consistent with the guidelines of the applicable multilateral export control regime.

This bill, as amended, is less problematic than the earlier version that passed the House and will not harm our efforts to halt international cooperation with Iran's WMD and missile programs. Therefore, I have signed H.R. 1883.

I want to make it clear that Russia continues to be a valued partner in the International Space Station (ISS). H.R. 1833 requires certain determinations for purchases from Russia related to the ISS, but does not affect Russia's important role as an ISS partner. My Administration will also continue to work closely with the General Director of the Russian Aviation and Space Agency in his role as Special Representative on non-proliferation.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
March 14, 2000.

NOTE: H.R. 1883, approved March 14, was assigned Public Law No. 106-178.

### **Remarks at a Rally for Gun Control Legislation**

*March 15, 2000*

**The President.** Thank you very much. Please be seated. Good morning, and welcome to the White House. I want to thank all the Members of the House who are here. We have a large contingent, as you can see, and a bipartisan one, for which I am very grateful. In a moment we will hear from Representatives McCarthy, Morella, and

Lofgren, speaking on behalf of all the Democrats and Republicans who are here with me today.

I want to thank Attorney General Reno and Secretary Summers for being here and for their support of our endeavors. I thank Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder. The Chief of Police of the District of Columbia, Charles Ramsey, is here, and other representatives of law enforcement.

I want to thank Michael Barnes from Handgun Control and former Member of the House, for his leadership. And I want to say a special word of welcome to my friend Suzann Wilson, who lost her daughter in the Jonesboro, Arkansas, school shooting, who has bravely carried on the struggle for a safer future for the children of this country ever since. And I want to welcome all the young people who are here today.

Six years ago, at the White House, I signed the Brady law. I was especially pleased that day to be standing beside two very brave fighters against gun violence, Attorney General Reno and Sarah Brady. Today, as I stand with Congresswomen McCarthy, Morella, and Lofgren, I am reminded again that women from both parties have been and remain at the forefront of this fight. And I know I speak for the other people who are here today to say I am glad they allowed some of their male counterparts in the House—*[laughter]*—to join them.

When I signed the Brady bill, I said that our efforts proved once again that democracy can work. The American people in their grassroots demand for commonsense action against gun violence, prevailed over a very powerful Washington gun lobby. Today, America is a safer place thanks to the Brady bill and other measures that many here in this room championed, from banning assault weapons to cop-killer bullets, to putting 100,000 police on the street. The overall crime rate has fallen 7 years in a row, homicide to the lowest rate in 30 years. But time and time again we see still, from Columbine to Buell Elementary School, it is still far too easy for guns to fall into the hands of criminals and children.

We have been trying for some time now, as all of you know, to further strengthen our gun laws, by passing a strong juvenile justice

bill that closes the gun show loophole, requires child safety locks with all new handguns, and bans the importation of large capacity ammunition clips which, unbelievably, is still legal and threatens to make a mockery of our assault weapons ban.

Once again, the gun lobby and their allies in the leadership of the Congress are standing in the way of real progress. And once again, we battle not just for the safety of our families but for the soundness of our democracy. For over 8 months, the majority leadership, under pressure from the gun lobby, has refused to allow the House and the Senate conferees to meet and have a substantive debate on the juvenile justice bill.

Representative Conyers has negotiated in good faith with Representative Hyde. I had the conference leaders here last week, and it was clear to me, from the discussion between them and with the rest of us, that they were much closer together, even though still considerably apart, than the position that the NRA has taken against our legislation. But we still haven't been able to get the committee to meet.

Now Representative Zoe Lofgren from California has offered a simple motion. It simply says, one version of this bill passed the Senate; one version of this bill passed the House 8 months ago; the conferees should meet. That's all it says. It says the Congress ought to do the job it was hired to do.

Again, I want to thank the Republican Members who have shown up here, to stand here today. I don't even know, because we haven't talked about it, whether they would agree with me on every provision of this bill. But they want a bill, and they want the conferees to meet. And I will say again, I know the conventional wisdom is in election years we're not supposed to do anything. I think that's wrong. We all still draw a check in election years, just like we do in nonelection years, and we're all here. And these kids, they keep dying every day. They don't know it's an election year. So I thank Zoe Lofgren and all these people who are here, for saying that we ought to get on with the business of the Nation.

Now unbelievably enough, the gun lobby—who would do well in this conference, I think; I don't like it very much, but I think they'd do pretty well—they don't want this conference to meet. And they're actually threatening retribution against lawmakers if they vote for Zoe Lofgren's resolution to meet. Why is that? Because they know the people aren't with them, that's why. Because they know that the people who have experience out there in the country, whether they're Republicans or Democrats or independents, once they understand what the issue is and that nobody's trying to take any hunter's gun away or burden anybody's legal rights, we're just trying to keep children alive—once they understand that, they know that they cannot win the public debate.

I got a little tickled over the weekend when they got a little rough with me. I mean—[laughter]—you know, I have so much scar tissue now, I can't even feel it. [Laughter] So it's totally immaterial to me what they say. And that should not be an issue for any of you.

You know, none of us—any of us get these elected jobs, we ask for them; nobody makes us take these jobs. So that's completely irrelevant. The only thing that should matter, the only thing that should matter, is what is the best course in our country to make America the safest big country in the world and to save the lives of these dozen kids that are getting killed every day from gun violence. That should be the only thing that matters.

And there are legitimate, practical issues that have to be worked through in these areas. But believe me, I've been there. I'm one of the few Presidents that's ever been to any of these gun shows. I've actually been to them. And I've been to them way out in the country, where all of the practical problems allegedly arise. And in all candor, I think that taking a little time and a little inconvenience to save a lot of lives is a good deal for America.

I also believe that we cannot make this the only area of our national life where our only response is punishment and no prevention. Suppose I gave a speech to you today. Suppose I called you here to say, my fellow Americans, I am incredibly burdened by the fact that these airport metal detectors are a

pain for a lot of people, and 99.9 percent of all the people who walk into airports are good, law-abiding citizens and would never do anything wrong, and a lot of them have money clips in their pockets and have to go through those metal detectors 2 or 3 times, and I just think it's terrible. And so we're going to take the metal detectors out of the airport, and the next time somebody blows up an airplane we're going to put 10 years on their sentence. [Laughter] Anybody want to support that policy? [Laughter]

Suppose I said to you, my fellow Americans, I brought you here because I'm getting older and a little heavier and those seatbelts are really uncomfortable for me—[laughter]—and because the overwhelming majority of automobile drivers in America are good, law-abiding people and safe people, I want to abolish the speed limits and rip the seatbelts out of all our cars—[laughter]—and if somebody does something wrong, I want to add 5 years to their sentence. Now, that's the logic here.

Why should this be the only area of our national life where we say no prevention, only punishment? Attorney General Reno has increased gun crime prosecutions. Why do we fight for 100,000 police? Why are all these police groups here fighting for 100,000 police? Not primarily to catch criminals quicker, but because they knew if they were on the street in the neighborhoods, they would prevent crime in the first place. That's what this is about.

So, again, there's an old proverb that says, he who throws the first blow admits he has run out of arguments. [Laughter] In 1993, they said the Brady bill would violate the second amendment. But the right to keep and bear arms in deer season is still alive and well in Arkansas, but 500,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers weren't able to get handguns. It was the right thing to do.

Gun crimes have fallen by 35 percent-plus since 1993. Today I'm honored to announce the results of the Justice Department's first annual review of the instant criminal background check system put in place in November of 1988 under the Brady law. In the first year, the insta-check system, in one year, stopped 179,000 illegal gun sales, over two-

thirds to people who were indicted or convicted of felony crimes. Most of the rest were fugitives or domestic or drug abusers. All told now, as I said, half a million guns have been stopped from falling into the wrong hands since 1993, proof positive that those who opposed the Brady bill in 1993 were wrong.

This is not an argument—we're having the same old argument. We have evidence now. And when it comes to the gun show, I would just remind you that back in 1993 the same crowd that's fighting closing the gun show loophole said, "You don't need the Brady bill because no bad actors ever buy guns at gun stores. They get them all at gun shows and urban flea markets and out of the backs of pickups and trunks of cars." So now we say, "Well, we did get a lot of them, but you're right, there still are a lot of those bad"—now they say, "Oh, well, we can't do that. It's too much of a burden."

Now, I don't believe that we can't reach agreement here. But the leadership of the Congress continues to resist and to cling to arguments that won't stand up in honest debate. And I'll bet in their heart of hearts they're pretty embarrassed by some of the things that their allies have said in the last few days.

They say gun shows would be put out of business if unlicensed dealers who sell guns have to comply with the background checks, which can take up to 3 business days to complete. But licensed gun dealers at gun shows already have to do background checks, if they're licensed, and they're still doing a very brisk business. Nearly three-quarters—now listen to this—nearly three-quarters of all the Brady background checks are completed within a few seconds under the insta-check system; 95 percent now completed in 2 hours or less. Less than 5—here's the rub, and I want everybody to focus on this—this is the rub of this legislation. Less than 5 percent of the Brady checks take longer than 24 hours. So if we put this in, most of this will be over in 2 hours; 95 percent will be over in 24 hours. But of the 5 percent that take more than 24 hours, they are 20 times more likely to be rejected for a problem. So this whole big old fight here is, in large measure, about those 5 percent.

Now, why in the wide world any organized group would be in the business of worrying about the inconvenience of those 5 percent is beyond me. Ninety-five percent of the people are going to be out of here; 75 percent of them are going to be out of here in an hour or less. Representative Conyers here has offered an agreement that would have the whole thing done in 24 hours, except for those that can't be done.

So again I say, I've heard all this—if you read the press on it, because so much of it is—and this is not a criticism of the press, it's the rhetoric of the fight—you would think this is about, will there be background checks or not. Why in the world would we not want to have an adequate check of these 5 percent that are 20 times more likely to be problem people and hurt innocent children and other people? That is the issue here.

And I'm telling you, I don't care what anybody says about people traveling from one town to the next to another gun show and being out in the rural areas and how much trouble it is. It's not that much trouble. They deposit the guns at the local police department or the sheriff's office. There's 50 different ways to solve this problem.

This is all just a smokescreen. Every last issue is turned into some major battle over the Constitution, when all we're trying to do is save lives.

So again, I want to say again, I'm grateful to the people who are here. I'm grateful that we have bipartisan representation. I hope the Republicans who are here don't get too much grief when they go back to Congress.

But I would like it if this were not a political issue. I would like it if it were not a partisan issue. I would like it if not a single vote could be made on this in the November election. I would like it if no one ever had to vote for any candidate on this ever again. I would like it if we had a national consensus to protect our children.

And it would not in any way, shape, or form, interfere with Americans to go about their business in the ways that Americans in my part of the country have from the beginning, in the hunting season, in the skeet shooting, in the sport shooting, and all that. It doesn't have anything to do with this.

But we're making a grave mistake when we continue to put up excuses for that for which there is no excuse and to pretend that this is the only area of our national life where only punishment and not prevention is the answer.

So I thank the folks who are here. I wish Representative Lofgren well, and I particularly appreciate the leadership of the women Members of the Congress in this issue that affects all of us.

I would like to now call on someone who, of all the people on this stage, has paid the highest price for our failure to do the right thing by our country, Representative Carolyn McCarthy.

*[At this point, Representatives Carolyn McCarthy, Constance A. Morella, and Zoe Lofgren made brief remarks.]*

**The President.** I want to leave you with two thoughts. First of all, not many people who pay the price Carolyn McCarthy did wind up having the personal strength to run for Congress. One of the biggest problems here is most of the people out there whose kids get killed in crimes or by accident, it's all they can do to put their own lives back together, take care of the rest of their kids, and go on with their lives. I can't believe that Suzann Wilson is still doing this after all these years.

There is only a—it was just kind of a God's grace that Jim and Sarah Brady happened to be nationally prominent people and in a situation where they could go on. Mike Barnes is trying to organize people that don't have anything like the natural inclination or ability to come up with the kind of money and power and then employ the kind of tactics that the typical lobby group does. But they're everywhere.

Yesterday I was contacted by a man that I've known for many years, to remind me of the incredible damage done to his family when his son and his son's friend were playing with a gun that killed the friend. His son doesn't have a mark on him, but it took him years to get over it, watching his best friend die there. There are people like this everywhere. And they shouldn't be denied and disenfranchised just because they're not organized. You have to speak for them.

The second thing I want to say is Congressman John Lewis is here. The Sunday before last, I joined him in the 35th anniversary of marching over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, a march that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. People in our lifetime, those of us that are old enough, over 35, actually died so all Americans could vote. I don't think they marched and died so that their votes would vanish in a howl of special interest politics in Washington. That's not what the Constitution or the Bill of Rights or the civil rights revolution was all about.

This is about more than guns. This is about whether democracy works. So I ask you, don't just go out and talk about how well these women did today and how moved you are. Do something. Mobilize your friends to do something. We can win this battle with your help.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Michael D. Barnes, president, and Sarah Brady, chair, Handgun Control, Inc., and her husband, former White House Press Secretary James S. Brady, who was wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan.

## Statement on the Congressional Budget Resolution

March 15, 2000

Today the Republican Congress took a first step on a risky budget that threatens to undermine the fiscal discipline that has led to our current economic prosperity. The budget blueprint they have endorsed fails to strengthen Social Security or Medicare, takes us off the path to paying down the debt by 2013, and threatens to slash key priorities like education, law enforcement, and the environment. It was the wrong approach for America last year—it is the wrong approach for America this year.

Republican leaders should work with me on a responsible budget that strengthens Social Security and Medicare, adds a prescription drug benefit, pays down the debt by 2013, and invests in education and other key priorities. Let's work together to meet

America's long-term challenges and keep our economy strong.

**Letter to Congressional Leaders  
Transmitting a Report on Federal  
Agency Climate Change Programs  
and Activities**

*March 15, 2000*

*Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)*

In accordance with section 568(b) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2000, as contained in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2000 (Public Law 106-113), I transmit herewith an account of all Federal agency climate change programs and activities. This report includes both domestic and international programs and activities related to climate change, and contains data on both spending and performance goals.

As the comprehensive nature of this report indicates, my Administration believes that climate change presents one of the premier challenges that America—and the world—will face in this new century. Informed by sound science and based on prudent measures, I believe it is critical that the Federal Government provide leadership to address this serious challenge and to act on behalf of our citizens and future generations. Our action plan, as detailed in this report, features numerous investments in scientific research, in proven public-private partnerships, and in efforts to promote new and developing technologies and practices that will not only reduce greenhouse gases, but will provide significant new economic opportunities and savings for American businesses and consumers.

I appreciate the interest of the Congress in this important issue and in our efforts to address it. I urge the Congress to fully support these initiatives and to join my Administration in meeting the challenge of climate change.

Sincerely,

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate.

**Remarks at a Democratic National  
Committee Dinner in Baltimore,  
Maryland**

*March 15, 2000*

Thank you very much. Peter, Mrs. Angelos, thank you for this incredible evening. Thank you all for coming and for your support. Thank you, Governor, for the kind words you said and for the great work you're doing in Maryland to try to protect people from gun violence. And I want to say, I agree with you; you do have the best Lieutenant Governor in the United States in Maryland. Thank you, Kathleen, thank you very much. And I'm something of an expert on that subject, having served as a Governor for a dozen years, served with 150 different Governors. And I think—it's amazing to me how many times the team of Glendening and Kathleen Kennedy Townsend have put Maryland first in all kinds of reforms, from education to what's good for children to community service, and now in your attempts to do everything you can to protect your children from violence. And you should be very proud of this. This State is very, very well-governed, and I'm grateful to you.

I want to thank the other leaders who have come here: your State treasurer; your secretary of state; speaker of the house, who invited me to come back to address the delegates one last time before I leave. That's good. When people come up to me and start thanking me for what I've done, I feel like it's a eulogy, and I have to pinch myself to make sure I'm still alive. [*Laughter*] I'm always kind of surprised anybody wants me to show up anymore. [*Laughter*] So I thank you very much for that.

President Dixon, Commissioner Daniels, I thank all of you for being here. I want to say a special word of appreciation to the Congress Members who are here, Ben Cardin and Elijah Cummings, who have been great friends and allies of ours throughout these last 7 years. I thank you. And Peter Franchot, thank you for your support. And Pete Rawlings, before he was the head of your fortunes with his legislative position, we used to work together on the education commission of the State. And whenever I needed somebody who'd stand up and say I was right



when I was challenging people to change 15 years ago, he was there. And I thank you for that.

Mayor D'Alesandro came up to me tonight, and he said—you may know that his sister is Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, and one of the ablest people in the Congress—he came up to me tonight and said, “Well, I want you to know there’s life after politics.” [Laughter] For which I thanked him. [Laughter] And I hope I’ll be around to see the evidence. [Laughter]

And I want to thank Dr. Richardson, the president of Morgan State. I want to acknowledge him. Morgan State gave me an honorary degree a couple years ago, and I got to speak there. It’s the only commencement I’ve ever attended where there were five different musical selections, and every one was better than the one before. You’ve got a lot to be proud of, having that fine institution here.

Mr. Mayor, I want to thank you and Katie for coming out to meet me at Fort McHenry and standing in the wind. And I’m glad the Irish saved Baltimore. [Laughter] I wish the same could be said of Washington—[laughter]—which the British did burn. And every night when I go home to the White House, there’s a big block we’ve left unpainted that still has the burn marks from where the British assaulted it in 1814, and I always—periodically, at least, I remind the people who work with me just to be humble because you never can tell what’s coming up the river there. [Laughter] And generally in life, that’s a good lesson to remember. [Laughter]

I’m thrilled by your election. I enjoyed working with your predecessor, Kurt Schmoke. I was jealous when you got over 90 percent of the vote. I couldn’t get over 90 percent of the vote if my name were the only one on the ballot. [Laughter] And I am, particularly in this week, profoundly grateful for what you said about Ireland. My people are from Fermanagh, in County Armagh, which is right on the border of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. And I have a little watercolor in the Residence of the White House of the oldest known residents of my mother’s people, the Cassidys. It’s an early 18th century farmhouse, which still is in existence. I’ve never been able to trace

my roots, beyond speculation, back before that. And it has been a great honor. And we’re having a little trouble in Ireland now, but we’re working through it, and I think it’s going to be all right. And if it hadn’t been for the Irish-American community, the United States never would have been able to do that. And so it means a lot to me that you said that tonight, and I thank you for that.

I want to finally, by way of introduction, beyond thanking Ed Rendell for agreeing when he left the mayoralty of Philadelphia, which has been fabulous to me and given me massive margins, I said, “I’ve got a little part-time job I’d like for you to do. Would you become chairman of the Democratic Party?” And he had earned a rest, and he didn’t take it, because he knows how important these elections are to our future—for the same reason Peter Angelos said. So I want to thank him.

Now, I’d like to say some things tonight in a fairly straightforward way. You can do that when you’re not running for anything. [Laughter] Most days I’m okay with that. [Laughter]

First of all, I feel profoundly indebted to Baltimore and to the State of Maryland for how good you’ve been to Hillary and me and Al and Tipper Gore. You’ve given us your electoral votes. You’ve always been there to support us. And through this administration of the Governor, you’ve been an ardent partner for us in so many of the things that I’ve tried to do for America. I don’t know how many times in the last 7 years I’ve come to Maryland to give the country evidence that this or that or the other thing could be done, whether it was in law enforcement or education or the economy or the environment. And so I thank you for that. I am very, very grateful.

Tomorrow somebody might ask you why you came here tonight, and so I want to ask you to think about what answer you would give. I hope you will say, as has been said, “Well, you know, when President Clinton and Vice President Gore were elected in 1992, they said they wanted to change America for the better, to give the Government back to the American people, not just to restore the economy but to bring our society

together, to build a more united community, and to enhance responsibility on the part of all citizens. And the economy is the best it's ever been. And the crime rate is down. The welfare rolls are down. Adoptions are up. Ninety percent of our kids are immunized for the first time; 150,000 of our kids have served in AmeriCorps serving their communities in Maryland and every other State and earning money for college. America has been a force for peace and prosperity around the world. We've got cleaner air, cleaner water. We've cleaned up 3 times as many toxic waste dumps as the previous administrations did in 12 years. We've had the first back-to-back balanced budgets in 42 years."

So the first answer is, you know, "They did what they said they'd do. They did what they said they would do." And one of the most personally rewarding things that has happened to me since I've been President occurred actually fairly early in my first term, when a professor I had never met, who was a scholar of the Presidency, wrote me and said I had already kept a higher percentage of my promises to the American people than the previous five Presidents had. And that was in the first term.

I believe in laying out a program and sticking to it. I think it's a great mistake to ask for a job if you don't know why you want it. So that's the first thing I hope you'll say.

The second thing I hope you will say is, there's an answer to Governor Bush's question about what Al Gore has been doing in Washington for the last 7 years. And again, I can say this: I haven't been Vice President, but I have made quite an extensive study in my life, intensified in the last 7 years, of every one of my predecessors and the Office of Vice President.

Much as I love and revere Franklin Roosevelt, he did not pick Harry Truman expecting he would be President or with some great thought for why he would be. And when he tragically died, then-Vice President Truman did not know about the existence of the atomic bomb. He did not even know that. And thank the good Lord we were lucky Harry Truman turned out to be a great man and a great President, who made the tough decisions that were necessary to build the next 50 years.

President Eisenhower gave some more thought, and President Kennedy did, and Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon both had more influence as Vice President than anyone before them. Then President Carter inaugurated a whole different way of dealing with Vice Presidents with Walter Mondale, who met with him every week, would come to every meeting. And to be fair—I don't want to be like our friends in the Republican Party—one of the things that Ronald Reagan did was to give then-Vice President Bush more responsibility, because the Carter-Mondale model had worked so well and because any President in his right mind knows that anything can happen in life and you might not be here tomorrow.

I had a different idea. I thought: Why would you want to be Vice President unless it was a real job, all day, every day? Who wants to hang around waiting for something bad to happen to the President? [Laughter] And I believed that the role that had been given to Vice President Mondale and then-Vice President Bush, was a good thing but only the beginning.

So in 1992, when I asked Al Gore to run with me, I defied all political convention. Some people thought I was too young; I picked a guy who was a year younger than me. Some people thought I was too southern; I picked a guy from a border State. Some people thought I was too much of a New Democrat; I picked a guy who basically agreed with me on the issues. But I also picked someone who knew about things that I did not know about, who had experience in the Congress, who knew a lot about science and technology, who understood a lot about the environment, who knew an enormous amount about arms control and foreign policy. And I picked someone who I thought had strengths that I didn't have, because I thought we could work together in harmony.

And I can tell you that if you look at the whole history of the United States and you ask any objective historian who has really studied it, Vice President Gore has been, by far—not even close, by far—the most influential, productive Vice President in the history of our Republic, without regard to party. No one has ever been close.

He broke the tie that passed the economic plan in 1993, without which we wouldn't be here celebrating tonight, because it drove the interest rates down and got this economy going again. He recently, as you just heard, broke the tie on the gun safety legislation. In between, he headed our empowerment program designed to bring economic opportunity to designated poor cities and rural areas in this country. He headed our partnership with Detroit to develop new generation vehicles, some of which are now at the Detroit auto show, that we developed over a 6-year period, working with the auto companies and the auto workers, getting 70, 80 miles to the gallon. They'll be in the showroom in the next couple of years. He headed a special commission with Russia and helped to continue to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and a special commission with South Africa to try to make sure that once they got real freedom and democracy after 300 years, it has a good chance to work.

And every tough decision I've had to take, whether it was a decision to try to restore democracy to Haiti or stop the slaughter in Bosnia or stop the slaughter in Kosovo or give financial aid to Mexico—on a day when a poll came out saying the people were 81-15 against it—every single tough decision, he backed it to the hilt. When we took on the tobacco interest and the NRA in a way that no previous administration of either party had ever done, he backed it to the hilt. So if somebody asked you the Governor Bush question, what's Al Gore been doing for the last 7 years, give them an earful, will you, because it's a good story. It's a good story.

The third thing I hope you will say is, you agree with the fights we're waging now. You can thank me later, when I'm a former President, if you're still so inclined, but I'm interested in what we're doing today. We're trying to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. We're trying to pass a bill to build 6,000 schools and modernize 5,000 a year for the next 5 years—very important issue. We're trying to double the number of children in after-school and summer school programs and pass a budget in Congress which would give every child in every disadvantaged school in the entire United States the chance to be in an after-school mentoring program. We're trying—

we have opened the doors of the first 2 years of college to all Americans through the HOPE scholarship. We've got 5 million people in college now getting the tax credits that were in the '97 Balanced Budget Act for college. I want to give people a tax deduction of up to \$10,000 for college tuition so we'll open the door for 4 years of college to all Americans. This is what we're trying to do now. These are important things.

We're working on the peace processes, from Northern Ireland to the Middle East, and I'm going to the Indian subcontinent at the end of the week. We're moving. The country is on the move. We're fighting attempts by the other party to pass tax cuts so big that we wouldn't be able to save Social Security and Medicare and pay the debt down and do the things that need to be done for our country.

So you ought to say, "The last 7 years have been good. They did what they said they'd do." Governor Bush wants to know what Vice President Gore has been doing the last 7 years. I think he's been doing good, real good.

And third, I agree with the fights that they're waging. The most important thing that we're doing right now, of course, is we're embroiled in this fight over gun safety. And I always—I suppose I should be glad because they're kind of unmasked, but it's always kind of sad to me when one of these fights turns real mean and personal. I have a pretty thick hide after all these years, and it's not really very effective when they say things like they've been saying the last few days, the gun lobby. But it obscures the reality.

Sometimes people just don't like you, and you don't know why. Have you ever had that happen to you? One of my favorite stories is this story about this guy that's walking along the edge of the Grand Canyon, and he slips off, and he's careening to his certain demise. And all of a sudden he sees this little twig sticking out of the canyon, and he grabs onto it, and it breaks his fall. And then all of the sudden the roots start coming out of the twig. And he looks up in the sky and he says, "God, why me? I'm a good man. I've taken good care of my family. I've worked hard, and I've paid my taxes all my life. Why me?" And this thunderous voice

comes out of the sky and says, "Son, there's just something about you I don't like." [Laughter]

Now, everybody has been in that situation. I know why the NRA, however, doesn't like me. They don't like me because I was shooting cans off a fencepost in the country with a .22 when I was 12 years old. They don't like me because I governed for 12 years in the State where half the people had a hunting license. And therefore, I know how to talk to people they try to scare up against us, those of us that want to have a safer world.

But the real issue is not the spokesman for the NRA saying that I want more deaths in America or that somehow we're responsible for the death of that wonderful, former basketball coach from Northwestern and all these absurd claims, which they will doubtless use to raise money on. The real issue is, we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years and the lowest gun death rate in 30 years, but no one in their right mind believes America is as safe as it ought to be or could be. And no one believes we should stop until we make America the safest big country in the world. Now, that's what I believe.

You know, when people start batting around responsibility for people's lives—one of the jobs that I was not prepared for as President—I never dreamed about, and I confess, I never thought about it—was the responsibility to comfort the grieving when their loved ones had died. I never thought when I was running for President I'd be meeting a plane carrying the body of my friend and brother, Ron Brown, and all those people who died in Croatia, trying to give those people a better life. I never thought I'd have to go down to one room after another at a military base and greet 19 families of 19 airmen that were killed by terrorists because they were serving us in Saudi Arabia. I never thought I'd have to go to a place like Oklahoma City, where nearly 170 people were killed by a man consumed by his hatred for our Government.

I never thought I'd have to have parents like the grieving mother and stepfather of young Kayla Rolland sit in the Oval Office. And what can you tell them, that you've got a little girl and their little girl is gone? So

I don't really think we should be talking about this debate in these terms.

When they fought me on the Brady bill, because they said it would be so burdensome to hunters and sports people, and I said it wouldn't, and we won. We had evidence now: 500,000 people have been kept from getting handguns because they were felons, fugitives, and stalkers. Unfortunately, the man who killed Ricky Byrdsong in Chicago, and a young Korean Christian walking out of his church and several other people, was able to get a gun illegally in another way.

Well, one of the ways people get guns, as the NRA said way back in '93, when they were against the Brady bill, they said, "Oh, well, people don't buy these guns at gun stores. They get them at these gun shows and these urban flea markets." So I said, "Well, let's just do a background check there." That's what this is about: child safety locks, money for smart gun technology, banning the importation of large ammunition clips—assault weapons are illegal in this country; then we let people import the ammunition clips that can convert legal weapons into assault weapons—and closing the gun show loophole.

And oh, there's been the awfulest outcry about how terrible this is and how burdensome this will be. And one of the reasons they don't like me is I've actually been to these country gun shows. You're the Governor of Arkansas, you've got to get out there and hustle around and go where the people are. And I've got a lot of friends that have bought hunting rifles at these country gun shows. And it's true, if you're out in the country and somebody has to go someplace else, it's a little bit of an inconvenience if you have to wait a day to get your gun. But every one of these places has a nearby police office or a sheriff's office where those guns could be deposited while a background check is done.

Most people I know of good conscience, that love to go into the deer woods, would do anything to keep another child alive. This is not what this is about. And 95 percent of these people could be checked in a day, and the other 5 percent that I want to wait 3 days to make sure we can check—their denial rate, because of their background problems,

is 20 times the denial rate for the 95 percent to clear in a day.

We're going to hold up the whole United States Congress, go 8 months after the Columbine slaughter? I didn't even talk about that, going to Columbine High School, going out to Springfield, Oregon, calling those people in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where I knew the people in the school. You know, I'm sorry, but I think it's worth a little inconvenience to save a lot of lives, and I think you do, too.

Ben Cardin was with me today when they won a great legislative victory over a tiny thing, because the NRA was trying to beat a resolution by Representative Zoe Lofgren from California, that simply said: Look, the Senate passed a good gun safety bill 8 months ago, and the House passed one that wasn't so good, but at least they passed a bill—and what Congress does when the Senate and House pass different bills, they get together, just like you do in Maryland, and you have a conference committee, and you work out a compromise, and you send it to the chief executive, and he signs or vetoes it.

They haven't met in 8 months. And the reason is, they know that our friends in the media back there cannot run a headline story every day for 8 months saying they haven't met. I mean, they can't. They've got a lot of work to do. Tomorrow there will be something else on the news. So they thought this thing will just go away if we just don't meet. But if we meet and we have to say what our position is, we'll get hurt, or something might happen. So they just never met.

So Zoe Lofgren introduced a resolution in the House today that simply said one thing: Meet. *[Laughter]* You draw a paycheck every 2 weeks, earn it. Meet. Do something on this bill. Even if it's wrong, do something. That's all it said. Well, the NRA acted like we were going to go confiscate guns. And they were up there pressuring people, handing out these awful pamphlets, running all these ads and everything.

So a bunch of them came down to the White House today, a bunch of the Members of the House, including about three Republicans, including Connie Morella from Maryland, who spoke, and Carolyn McCarthy spoke, whose husband was killed and whose

son was nearly killed by the man who was using an automatic weapon on the Long Island subway 7 years ago. She was a lifelong, Irish Catholic Republican. She switched parties, ran for Congress, became one of our Members. And I can tell you, we're really proud of her. She got up and talked about how callous it was for people who disagree with us on the issue to act like we don't care whether people die or not.

And the point I made was that—I was trying to get a little levity in the situation because it's so profoundly sad, but I also wanted people to think. I said—but these people at the NRA, what their position is, is that guns are different from every other single safety threat. Every other threat, we do as much prevention as possible. And then if somebody does something wrong and we catch them, we punish them. But we try to prevent.

I mean, every one of us was raised with that old “ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” right? But they say, “No, no, no, no prevention. Just throw the book at them if they do something wrong.”

And I asked the crowd, and I'll ask you, how would you feel if I called a press conference tomorrow morning and I said the following: “My fellow Americans, I have been really concerned about how difficult it is in crowded airports, with airplanes already delayed, for people to have to go through these metal detectors. And you've got a money clip in your pocket or a belt buckle that's too big, and you have to go through 2 or 3 times, and it's just a pain. Now, most people who fly on airplanes are completely honest. And 99.999 percent of them are being terribly burdened by these metal detectors. So I'm just going to take them out. And the next time somebody blows up a plane, if I catch them, I'm going to throw the book at them.” *[Laughter]*

You guys would think I had completely lost it, wouldn't you? What if somebody said to you, “You know, most people who drive cars are really good people. They're responsible drivers. They're never drunk when they drive. They're just as good as they can be. And I'm just tired of them being burdened with having to get a license and having to observe the speed limit. And by the way, we're going to rip all the seatbelts out of all

the cars, because most people do the right thing anyway.” I mean, it’s absurd, right? You know it’s absurd. That is the argument: no prevention, only punishment.

So this is a huge deal, much bigger than just the issue at hand. Look, I know what the Constitution says and, quite apart from the Constitution, the American people believe they ought to have the right to hunt; they ought to have the right to sports shooting. But the death rate from accidental gun shootings is 15 times higher in this country than it is in the next 25 biggest countries combined, for kids.

I had a fellow call me yesterday when he saw all the press about this, an old friend of mine, just to remind me that once in his garage many years ago his little boy and his little boy’s best friend were playing with a gun that they got somewhere else. The gun went off and killed his little boy’s best friend. I’ve known this guy forever. He said, “I just want to remind you of that; don’t forget that.” He said, “It took my son years to get over that. He had no wounds, no burdens, himself, but he had to live with seeing his friend die, and in front of him as a kid, in a game they were playing together with something they had no business in their hands.”

So I say to all of you, these are not issues to be taken lightly. And there are huge differences here between the parties and their leadership and between our nominees for President, and that’s going on this year.

Now, the last thing I would like to say to you is, we’ve got—what I hope this election will be—I hope and pray that there will be no votes on this gun issue in November. But the only way there can be no votes in it is if Congress does the right thing and starts saving kids lives and putting the lives of our children first.

But I want you to think about this. I want you to think—I want you to lift your sights now. I want you to say, “So I came here because they did good. I came here because Al Gore was the best Vice President in history. I came here because I agree with them on the fights they’re waging now.” The fourth thing I hope you’ll say is, the big issue, “This is the best time this country has ever known in many ways, and we have to make the most of it.”

That’s what I tried to say at the State of the Union Address. You know, when I became President, everybody was just worried about keeping the ship afloat and turning it around. Well, we’ve got it turned around now. What are we going to do with it?

How many times in your life have you made a mistake—if you’re over 30, you have, whether you admit it or not—how many times in your life have you made a mistake, not because times were bad, but because times were good in your life, because you thought everything was—in a business or in a family situation or just in your personal situation, you thought things were rocking along so well there was absolutely no questions to be asked and no consequences to breaking your concentration or indulging yourself a little when you should have been thinking down the road?

That’s what I want you to think about. We have a chance to save Social Security and Medicare for when the baby boomers retire, so we don’t bankrupt our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren. We’ve got a chance to get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835, so we keep interest rates low for a generation and the economy hot. We have a chance to give an excellent education to every child in this country by working with the schools and the States. We have a chance to meet the enormous environmental challenge of global warming and our local environmental challenges and to do it in a way that actually increases the rate of growth of the economy, not undermine it.

We have a chance to help people balance work and family by doing more for child care, by broadening family leave, by raising the minimum wage, by providing more health insurance coverage to lower income working people who can’t afford it. We have a chance to do these things. We have a chance to be the world’s leading force for peace and freedom and justice, to help people solve their racial, their tribal, their religious conflicts. And we have a chance to truly build one America at home and to stop the prejudice against people just because of their race or their religion or just because they’re gay or just because of their politics.

You know, the difference between us and our friends in the Republican Party is, I don’t

have any problem with people on the so-called religious right practicing their religion and taking their religion into politics. That's their business. I've never tried to demonize them. But if they were in power, they would demonize us, just like they did before. They don't think we should have the same rights that we're willing to give to them. They want us to live according to their rules. We're perfectly willing to let them live according to their rules. They want us to live according to theirs. And that's the difference.

And I just want you to think about that, because this is such a hopeful time for our country, but it will only work if we are very serious about this election. Now, you heard Peter talking about the money involved. The only reason the money is important is it costs money to communicate with people. The American people nearly always get it right if they have enough information and enough time. They've got a great internal compass, and they nearly always get it right. That's why we're still around here after over 200 years.

And it doesn't matter if they have more money than we do. They had \$100 million more than we did in 1998, and we still picked up seats in the House of Representatives, in the sixth outyear of a President's term for the first time since 1822. But we have to have enough.

So I want you to think about—this is the most important thing you can say. When you talk to people when you go home, more important than “they kept their promises,” more important than “Al Gore was the greatest Vice President,” more important than “I agree with them on the fight,” more important than the specific issues going toward the future, the most important thing is this: We have got to be one united country, committed to making the most of this moment.

Sunday, a week ago, I went to Selma, Alabama, for the 35th anniversary of the voting rights march on Bloody Sunday across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. And for me as a white southerner, it was a moment of a lifetime. Unless you were part of all that back then, you can't imagine what it meant to me, the honor I felt just to be there, to be with John Lewis, who I've admired and loved, and Coretta Scott King and Hosea Williams, getting up out of his wheelchair to walk across

the bridge, and Dick Gregory and Reverend Jackson, and all these other people.

Kids find it hard to believe that 35 years ago, you could get killed—white or black—you could get killed for fighting for the right to vote. And what's that got to do with this? Here's what it's got to do with this. We're now in the longest economic expansion in American history—20-year low in poverty record lows in African-American and Hispanic unemployment. The longest one we've ever had. Do you know when we broke the record? Do you know what record we broke? The economic expansion of 1961 through 1969.

I finished high school in 1964. President Kennedy had just been killed. President Johnson was in office. The country had rallied behind him. Unemployment was low. Growth was high. Inflation was low. And I'll tell you something, we thought it would go on forever. And not just the economy. We thought we'd win the cold war without incident, and we thought our President and our Congress would solve the civil rights problems of America through legislation in the Congress. And we thought we were going to rock on forever.

In 1965 we had Bloody Sunday. In 1966 we had riots in our streets. By 1968—I graduated from college on June 8—it was 2 days after Senator Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for President anymore. Our country was split right down the middle. Richard Nixon was elected President, saying he represented the Silent Majority, which meant those of us who weren't for him were in the loud minority.

It was just a version of what you see today. It was—this old country is divided between “us” and “them.” And we've had these “us” and “them” elections. I've done my best to end it. But that's what you see: “us” and “them,” “us” and “them.” And a few months after that, the longest economic expansion in American history was gone.

I've been waiting for 35 years—not as President, ever since I was a young man—I have waited for 35 years for my country to be in a position to build a future of our dreams for our children. Now, that is fundamentally what this election is about. And

when you hear the gun debate, the education debate, the tax versus pay down the debt and save Social Security and Medicare debate, you need to be asking yourself every single time: Which decision is more likely to allow us to come together as one America and to build the future of our dreams for our children? Because when I was a kid, we thought all this was going on automatic. And then one day it came off, the wheels came off, and it was gone. And for 35 years I have waited. I have worked as hard as I can for 7 years to give you this chance. And it is in your hands. Don't let anybody you know vote in this election without asking themselves that question: How do we build the future of our dreams for our children?

Thank you. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 p.m. in the White Hall Ballroom at the Harbor Court Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Peter and Georgia Angelos, dinner hosts; Gov. Parris N. Glendening and Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland; Richard N. Dixon, State treasurer, and president, State board of education; John T. Willis, Maryland secretary of state, Casper R. Taylor, Jr., speaker, and Peter Franchot and Howard P. Rawlings, members, Maryland House of Delegates; Sheila Dixon, president, Baltimore City Council; Ronald L. Daniel, commissioner, Baltimore City Police Dept.; former Mayors Thomas D'Alesandro III and Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore; current Mayor Martin O'Malley of Baltimore and his wife, Katie; Earl S. Richardson, president, Morgan State University; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association; Veronica and Michael McQueen, mother and stepfather of 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King; civil rights activists Hosea Williams and Dick Gregory; and civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson.

## Remarks on Departure for Capitol Hill and an Exchange With Reporters March 16, 2000

### Legislative Agenda/Oil Prices

**The President.** Good afternoon. I'd like to say just a few words, before I go up to

the Speaker's annual Saint Patrick's Day luncheon, about three issues.

Yesterday the House took a small but significant step down the long road toward commonsense gun safety legislation. House Members from both parties have said it's time to get to work, after 8 months and other senseless shootings. It's time for the House and Senate conference to resolve the differences between the two bills and send one to me.

The American people have spoken clearly and consistently about the need to protect our children from gun violence. The House is listening. I hope the Republican leaders in the House and the Senate will listen and get this conference underway.

Of course, a meeting is just a beginning. Congress should keep working until it sends me a bill I can sign that closes the gun show loophole, requires child safety locks with all new handguns, bans the importation of large capacity ammunition clips. Again, I hope they will reconsider and restore the provision that hold adults responsible if they knowingly or recklessly let little children have access to guns.

A courageous, bipartisan majority in the House has now said no to the attack ads, no to the name-calling, and no to the threats. They have stood up for the American people, but there are further tests ahead. The clock is ticking, and America is waiting to see whether Congress can really produce a bill that responds to the interests of our children and not the intimidation of the NRA.

I'd also like to say a few words about the budget the House passed yesterday. It is more than a balance sheet; every budget is. It's a blueprint for our future. For 7 years, our administration has worked to build a future based on fiscal discipline. The budget proposed by the Republican leadership would erode that discipline. It would weaken, not strengthen, the foundation Americans have worked so hard to build for the future.

Before devoting a single dollar to pay down the debt or extend the solvency of Social Security or Medicare or provide a voluntary prescription drug benefit or invest in our children's education, the majority's budget already spends almost half a trillion dollars in tax cuts—almost half a trillion, and as the



Republican budget makes clear, they're just getting started.

This is unrealistic, unwise. The risks it poses are unconscionable. It is as risky and costly as the budget they proposed last year that I vetoed. It would undermine our ability to make America debt-free by 2013, to strengthen Social Security and take it out beyond the life of the baby boom generation, to lengthen the life of Medicare and add a voluntary prescription drug benefit. It would slash our most pressing priorities across the board, from education and the environment, from law enforcement to public health, from scientific research to basic nutrition. It would be impossible for them to follow the path that we have all agreed on to modernize our defense forces and improve the quality of life of our men and women in uniform.

This is the wrong path for America. The only way they could meet their spending priorities with this tax cut is to go back to huge deficits. I asked the leadership to change course, to go back and write a budget that maintains our fiscal discipline and meets our most pressing priorities.

Now, the third issue I would like to mention very briefly is that I have just met with the Secretary of Energy and his team and my economic team, and we have talked about the present difficulties that Americans are facing because of the price of gasoline and the high price of oil, and what our short and longer term options are. And we've been working very hard on this now for several weeks, and we hope to have some things to say about it over the next few days.

But this is—I'm encouraged by a lot of the developments that are going on. I hope there will be some relief soon when the OPEC meeting occurs. But I do believe we need to do more on our own here in America to deal with some of the things we've learned, some of the pressure points we've learned are on our people in these last few months.

So I just want to notify you that we are working on this, and we will have some more to say later, and I don't want to be late to the Speaker's Saint Patrick's Day lunch.

**Q.** Mr. President, on the question of gun control—

### **Oil Prices**

**Q.** Mr. President, have you spoken in person to any of the leaders of the OPEC nations to increase—

**The President.** Wait, wait. The answer is, we have made clear what my public position is. I've said no more to anybody privately than I've said in public. I think it is in the interest of the OPEC nations and in the interest of the consuming nations to have a stable price of oil that gives them a fair return on their oil, enables them to run their countries and finance their budgets, but is not so high that it runs the risk of promoting inflation or recession, which will reduce the demand for oil by cratering the economies of other countries and hurting ours and hurting a lot of innocent people in the process.

So the trick is to find the right balance. Oil was way too low last year because they increased production right as demand dropped after the Asian financial crisis. Now, the price is too high because they cut production right as demand increased, when Europe and Asia were growing more again.

So we've got to get this back into balance. That's what I want to do. I think it's very much in their interest, and I haven't said any more in private than I'm saying to you in public, but we are working that.

### **National Rifle Association**

**Q.** Mr. President, Wayne LaPierre, last night on the news, said the blood of Ricky Byrdsong is on your hands. I was wondering if you would like to respond to that personally, sir, and also go to the underlying issue of enforcement? The NRA contends the administration has been lax up until very recently on the enforcement issue.

**The President.** Well, first of all, most of those—I think the television news, some of the reports answered the Byrdsong case in great detail, and I don't have anything to add to that. And again, I will say, I don't think—getting into a personal spat with Mr. LaPierre about tactics that I don't think any American appreciates and that all Americans can see through is not worth doing.

I think on the enforcement issue, if you just go back and look at the facts that were reported on the news last night in this case, I think it makes the case. The question is:

What should the States do? What should the Federal Government do? What is the appropriate thing to do in the Brady cases? And I believe what we've tried to do is the right course.

I think the Attorney General has tried to increase Federal gun prosecutions. We've asked for resources to do more. But we've also tried to do it in a sensible way that left a lot of the burden and the criminal law where it belongs, with the local prosecutors. And I think to try to take a case like that, where actually the Brady bill worked, and if we had more comprehensive checking so that no one could sell a gun without a Brady background check, we'd have an even safer society, is not a very good argument for the other side to make.

And I think it's truly ironic that the NRA is now criticizing us for not throwing everybody in jail that fails a Brady background check when they opposed the Brady bill. If it had been up to them, we wouldn't be doing these background checks, and 500,000 more felons, fugitives, and stalkers would have handguns, so—

#### **Northern Ireland Peace Process**

**Q.** Is there a break in the Irish impasse?

**The President.** Thank you. We're working it.

#### **National Rifle Association**

**Q.** Can I follow up on that, sir? Mr. President, why do you think the NRA has chosen this particular moment, though, to attack you?

**The President.** I have no idea. I really don't know. Must be a good fundraising tactic. I honestly don't know. I don't know.

**Q.** Because they've had their way mostly on Capitol Hill, it seems, up to this point.

**The President.** I don't know. I think they know that the majority of the American people support us on this bill, and if they get the bill before the Congress, it will pass. So maybe it's some strategy to try to keep it from ever being in an acceptable form to be voted on one way or the other.

I don't know. You'll have to ask them. I can't figure it out. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks,

he referred to Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

#### **Remarks Honoring the 1999 Stanley Cup Champion Dallas Stars**

*March 16, 2000*

**The President.** Thank you very much. Please be seated. I want to welcome Thomas Hicks and his family, Gary Bettman and his daughter to the White House. Robert Gainey, the manager; and to all the Stars, including the captain, Derian Hatcher—I might say the first American-born captain of a Stanley Cup team.

And I welcome Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson here, who is very proud of this team. We're glad to have you back in the White House. There are a lot of people from Texas here today, including many members of our administration and former members of our administration. I want to welcome you here. I often—I miss it when you don't come by. And now I know how to get you back. *[Laughter]* So thank you.

As all of you know, we're here to congratulate the 1999 Stanley Cup winner, the Dallas Stars. Ice hockey is a fascinating game, but for those of us who grew up in the South, we know it's normally dominated by people north of the Mason-Dixon line. There was not a skating rink in my hometown until I was over 40 years old.

But the Dallas Stars changed the perception of hockey. They were the first Sun Belt team to win hockey's Holy Grail in the 107-year history of the contest. So now Dallas will be known not just for the Cowboys and Super Bowls but for the Stars and the Stanley Cup.

It occurred to me when I was getting ready for this that hockey is a lot like Washington politics. It's a rough game—*[laughter]*—with a lot of lead changes. And usually you never know who's going to win until the final moment.

And that is, of course, literally what happened last June in game six, when the Stars clinched their first Cup—3 overtimes, 111 minutes, all of us, even people like me who don't skate very well, on the edge of our seats. We watched Ed Belfour block shot after shot, MVP Joe Nieuwendyk leading the

charge on offense. And I still remember when Brett Hull shoveled the last puck past Dominik Hasek, a man I once met in Buffalo, to capture the win. I would be afraid to try to put anything past the guy. *[Laughter]* This was a very impressive game, to those who are initiated and those who are becoming initiated into the thrills of professional hockey.

Opening and closing the year with a victory over the Sabres, that final game was a perfect ending to a nearly perfect season. The Dallas Stars not only took home the Cup but also the president's award with the best record in the league for the second year in a row.

And I want to also acknowledge someone who is not here today, the coach. Every good coach I know, and I've been privileged to know quite a few great ones, always say that the players make great coaches. But great coaches also help the players bring out the best and play as a team.

The Stanley Cup is the oldest athletic trophy in North America. So it's about more than winning. It embodies our fascination with athletics, with determination, with teamwork. All the Dallas Stars earned this Cup. And after seeing Wednesday night's victory over the Devils, I see you're not going to give it up without a fight. I like people who don't give it up—*[laughter]*—without a fight.

Congratulations to all of you. And now I'd like to ask the commissioner of the National Hockey League, Gary Bettman, to say a few words.

*[At this point, Mr. Bettman, team owner Thomas Hicks, and team captain Derian Hatcher made brief remarks. Mr. Hatcher presented a Stars jersey to the President.]*

**The President.** You may have noticed today that I had this tie on. We had the annual Speaker's Saint Patrick's Day lunch today a day early up on Capitol Hill, so maybe I should just wear this tomorrow. *[Laughter]* This is great.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mr. Bettman's daughter Brittany; Dallas Stars general manager Robert Gainey, players Ed Belfour, Joe Nieuwendyk, and Brett Hull, and

head coach Ken Hitchcock; and Buffalo Sabres goalie Dominik Hasek.

## Videotape Remarks to the Carnegie Endowment's Annual Nonproliferation Conference

March 16, 2000

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Carnegie Endowment's Annual Nonproliferation Conference. I thank you for coming together again to focus on the crucial task of curbing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. All of you know how serious this challenge is, from North Korea's nuclear and missile programs to ongoing risks that sensitive materials and technologies will spread from the former Soviet Union, including to Iran, to the imperative of bringing China into global nonproliferation regimes, to the continuing need for vigilance against Saddam Hussein.

Stemming this tide has been a critical priority for me for 7 years now, and it will be for this year, as well. In a few days, I'll travel to South Asia. There are those in the region who hope we will simply accept its nuclear status quo and move on. I will not do that. India and Pakistan have legitimate security concerns. But I will make clear our view that a nuclear future is a dangerous future for them and for the world. And I'll stress that narrowing our differences on nonproliferation is important to moving toward a broader relationship.

I know there are some who have never seen an arms control agreement they like, because rules can be violated, because perfect verification is impossible, because we can't always count on others to keep their word. Still, I believe we must work to broaden and strengthen verifiable arms agreements. The alternative is a world with no rules, no verification, and no trust at all.

It would be foolish to rely on treaties alone to protect our security. But it would also be foolish to throw away the tools that sound treaties do offer: a more predictable security environment, monitoring inspections, the ability to shine a light on threatening behavior and mobilize the entire world against it. So this year we will work to strengthen the

Biological Weapons Convention. We'll increase momentum for universal adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. And as to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, I am determined that last year's unfortunate Senate vote will not be America's last word.

With the leadership of General Shalikashvili, we will work hard this year to build bipartisan support for ratification. I will continue to call on other nations to forgo testing and join the treaty. We must not lose the chance to end nuclear testing forever. We must also take the next essential step, a treaty to cut off production of fissile material.

I know this conference will assess the potential impact of our program directed at emerging missile threats, such as from North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. I've stressed that a U.S. decision on a limited missile defense will take into account not only the threat, feasibility, and cost but also the overall impact on our security and arms control.

The ABM Treaty remains important to our security. Today, dealing with dangerous new missile threats is also vital to global security. So we will continue to work with Russia on how to amend the treaty to permit limited defenses while keeping its central protections, and we'll continue to seek a START III treaty that will cut our strategic arsenals to 20 percent of their cold war levels.

Let me conclude by wishing you a productive meeting. I value your advice. I count on your dedication, and I thank you for all you're doing to build a safer world.

NOTE: The address was videotaped at approximately 11:50 a.m. on March 10 in Room 459 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building for later broadcast, and it was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 16. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## **Remarks at an American Ireland Fund Dinner**

*March 16, 2000*

President Glucksman, Mr. Aikins, Senator Mitchell, members of the administration and Congress who are here, and our distinguished Ambassadors of the United States to Ireland and Ireland to the United States. To

all the leaders of the parties from Northern Ireland who are here.

Secretary Mandelson and, in his absence from his video, I would also say I very much appreciate what Tony Blair said earlier. And most of all, to you, Taoiseach, I thank you. I thank you for the award, and I thank the American Ireland Fund for all it has done for peace and progress in Ireland.

And I want to say that this is about the most beautiful piece of Irish crystal I've ever seen. It also bares, as my wife said, a remarkable resemblance to a golf ball. *[Laughter]* And it is only for that reason and because he does not play, that I do not feel constrained to let it reside for half a year with George Mitchell—*[laughter]*—to whom we are all profoundly indebted.

You know, basically, I don't believe that Presidents should get awards. The job itself is reward enough. But I'm honored and pleased to have this one, because, for me, the work for peace that I have done and our administration—Hillary, through the Vital Voices networks—it's been a labor of love at all hours of the day and night and through many months of frustration, through all of the efforts I've made just to understand, sometimes, the fights which seem to me to be inexplicable.

So much has been accomplished in the last 2 years, especially, but really over the last almost 8 years. At the moment, we wish that the institutions were up, not down; we wish that everybody was in agreement, not feeling frustrated; but we must never forget that the ceasefires now are measured in years, not weeks, that people now shop in their down-towns without fear of bombs going off, that the gradual return to normal life was again reflected today in the announcement of the British Government that further troops will be redeployed for duty outside Northern Ireland, leaving no army battalion resident in Belfast for the first time in 31 years.

More than 300 prisoners from both sides have been released; human rights and equality commissions have been formed; police reform is underway, and we are looking forward to the reform of the criminal justice system. A peace dividend has begun to take hold in Northern Ireland's economy, more

people employed there than ever before, unemployment the lowest in 20 years. tourists up by 11 percent last year alone, American visitors doubling in the last decade, rising investment in trade, and economy becoming as modern as that of our Irish and British counterparts.

I am very proud of the role the United States has played in this economic rebirth as well. The International Fund For Ireland, to which we are the largest donor, has leveraged a billion and a half dollars of direct investment, helping to create over 30,000 jobs. The Walsh visa program will bring thousands of young Irish men and women to the United States for education and training, especially in high-tech areas.

Our new micro-lending program, Aspire, is inspiring small business and entrepreneurs at a rapid rate. And as the Taoiseach said, a year ago at this time, the people of Northern Ireland did not enjoy self-rule. Last year, the assembly was established, the executives, the bodies were put to work, and lo and behold, the Irish were pretty good at self-government in the North as well. Ministers from both sides met together, worked together, took care of constituents together, made mistakes together and learned together, just the sort of thing democratic governments ought to do everywhere. They were successfully tackling some of their toughest shared problems and building structures for cross-border cooperation with the Irish Republic.

Now what? Well, we must begin by respecting the will of the people. After all, they voted in record numbers not for stalemate and delay but for progress and peace. The threat of violence from whatever source must be removed forever, from Northern Ireland's politics clearly and unequivocally.

At the same time, the people have the right to expect their leaders, with the support of the Irish and British Governments, to show vision and good will, to come together to establish a basis upon which the new institutions can be restored and the Good Friday accord can be implemented in full just as the people voted.

The United States and all the friends of peace must do all we can to assist, to honor the heroic efforts of Senator Mitchell, to reaffirm our lasting pledge that so long as the

people of Northern Ireland walk the road of peace, we will walk with you. Tomorrow at the White House I will be discussing this with the parties and listening and working for an answer.

The last century began with bloodshed across Ireland, and across the United States in our cities, signs that read, "No Irish need apply." This one begins with the best hope for Irish peace in our lifetimes and with Irish and Americans of every background gathered in Washington to rejoice in Ireland's rich contributions to America's national life.

I don't know that I've had so much to do with this, the progress that has been made. Tonight I am more burdened by the fact that I have not found an answer for the present stalemate. But I will say this: I have loved Ireland. My wife and my daughter have loved Ireland, North and South. We love the music, the dance, the language, the land.

If Mr. Yeats was right when he said, "Our glory begins and ends in our friends," I can say truly, I have simply tried to be a friend. But as a friend who, unlike Taoiseach here, has a term limit and, therefore, who no longer has to stand for election, I must honestly say that I have spent an enormous amount of time as President comforting the victims of violence, mostly Americans, the people who died in Croatia trying to help overcome ethnic and religious hatred in the Balkans, the people who died in a terrorist bombing in the Middle East, trying to help the people of that land and region find a different way, Irish victims of the Omagh bombing, the children's families who died in the school shootings in America and on and on.

And I have spent a great deal of time trying to decide exactly what it is that makes people define the meaning of their lives in terms of their differences, their religion, their racial, their ethnic, their tribal differences, and how those differences come to be magnified in our minds, along with the accumulated grievances of past wrongs, so that we are paralyzed to turn the clenched fist into the open hand, and how, even when we start—and what a start we have made in Ireland—it is just hard to go on and easy to stop.

I must confess, as your friend, I still do not know the answer to these things. But I

do know that life is fleeting, and opportunities come and also go. We have the chance of a lifetime here. You have done it—all of you, the Irish parties, have done this. The British have done it. We Americans, we've just been friends. But good friends tell each other the truth, the loving truth. Whatever the differences, it's not worth another life—not one. It's not worth another day's delay, much less a year. We're all just passing through this old world with an amount of time which we know not.

We're really happy and proud to be here tonight because we sense that good things have happened because people rose above their fears, their hatred, their honest wounds, their deep scars, to give a better future to their children. They're still out there, and they're still waiting. We have to find a way to put this back on track. And if we do, everyone will win. And that beautiful crystal piece there, it'll be a crystal ball, showing a way to our children's tomorrow.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:42 p.m. in the Center Hall at the National Building Museum. In his remarks, he referred to Loretta Brennan Glucksman, president, Kingsley Aikins, executive director, American Ireland Fund; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; U.S. Ambassador to Ireland Michael J. Sullivan; Irish Ambassador Sean O'Uiginn; Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Peter Mandelson and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland. Prior to his remarks the President received the American Ireland Fund's Millennium Peace Award.

### **Remarks on the Gun Safety Agreement With Smith & Wesson and an Exchange With Reporters** *March 17, 2000*

**The President.** Good afternoon. For 7 years, our administration has worked on every front to reduce violence and to keep our communities safer. That's why we've pushed for commonsense gun safety legislation, why I've taken executive action to crack down on bad gun dealers, and why, in December, I said we would engage gun manu-

facturers in ways to seek changes in how they do business.

Today I am pleased to report that a key member of the industry has decided to set a powerful example of responsibility. Earlier today Smith & Wesson signed a landmark agreement with the Federal Government and States and cities across our Nation.

For the very first time, a gun manufacturer has committed to fundamentally change the way guns are designed, distributed, and marketed. Under the agreement, Smith & Wesson will include locking devices and other safety features and will develop smart guns that can be fired only by the adults who own them. The company will cut off dealers who sell disproportionate numbers of guns that turn up in crimes and will require all its dealers not to sell at gun shows unless every seller at the shows conducts background checks.

The company has also agreed to design new firearms that do not accept large capacity magazines and will work with ATF to provide ballistics fingerprints for all its firearms. This agreement is a major victory for America's families. It says that gunmakers can and will share in the responsibility to keep their products out of the wrong hands. And it says that gunmakers can—and will—make their guns much safer without infringing on anyone's rights.

It has taken courage and vision for Smith & Wesson to be the first manufacturers to negotiate. And I applaud their determination to do right by their company and their country. As I've said all along, there are responsible citizens in the gun industry who do want to make progress on this issue. I hope today's announcement will encourage others to respond in kind.

This agreement could not have come to pass without the leadership of many mayors, city attorneys, and State attorneys general. I'm glad to be joined today by Attorney General Eliot Spitzer of New York and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, as well as Mayors Alex Penelas of Miami, Bill Campbell of Atlanta.

In a moment, I'll be telephoning some other mayors—Joe Gamin of Bridgeport, Dennis Archer of Detroit, Roosevelt Dorn of Inglewood, California, Marc Morial of

New Orleans, Jimmy Yee of Sacramento, as well as city attorneys Jim Hunt of Los Angeles and Louise Renne of San Francisco, and the city attorneys of Berkeley, California, Camden, New Jersey, and St. Louis—to congratulate them as well on joining this agreement and to urge them to continue to work to keep our children safe.

I would also like to express my appreciation to former Congressman Mike Barnes, the new president of Handgun Control. I thank them all as well as the members of our administration team who worked so hard on this: Treasury Secretary Larry Summers and Deputy Secretary Eizenstat; Attorney General Reno and Deputy Attorney General Holder, HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo, and my Domestic Policy Adviser, Bruce Reed. They have also worked very hard to bring us to this historic moment.

Let me say again today, the effort to reduce gun violence, to protect our children, to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children, is not about politics. It is about saving lives. This agreement shows we can get so much done when we find the courage to find common ground.

Thank you very much.

### **Other Gun Manufacturers**

**Q.** What's the chance of other companies falling in line?

**The President.** Well, I don't know. You know, Smith & Wesson is a real giant in this field. And as I said, it took a lot of courage for the company and its leader to do this. But I think the American people will have such an overwhelmingly positive response to what they have done, that I would hope the other manufacturers would follow suit.

We have had some success, you know. A number of other manufacturers are already embracing the idea that new handguns ought to have child trigger locks. So I hope that they will do these things.

The—continuing to work on smart gun technology, and I think saying that they won't continue to allow their guns to be sold by dealers that don't clearly follow the law and that they won't participate in gun shows that don't do background checks, that's a big deal. That's a very important thing.

So I really—I'm very pleased by what they've done, and I think, as I said, I hope the American people will express their appreciation to Smith & Wesson, and I hope that others will follow suit.

### **Oil Prices**

**Q.** Mr. President, on the issue of oil, do you expect to announce any of the measures that you talked about yesterday that you hope to do in the next couple of days to reduce the effect of high oil, gas, and diesel prices before leaving for India. And the second question, if I may, on the same subject, did you discuss the oil market with King Fahd yesterday or with any other Saudi officials, and did they give you any assurances regarding production increases for March 25th OPEC meeting?

**The President.** Well, the answer is yes, I expect to have something to say before I leave for India, and yes, I talked about the markets with His Majesty King Fahd. And I think it's appropriate for me to let the OPEC members make their own decisions. But the Saudis have already expressed their support publicly for a production increase.

I think everybody's struggling now to find a consensus. The point I've been trying to make is that it is necessary, in order to get the oil prices down to an acceptable level but still have them at a high enough level to earn a fair return to the producing countries and to keep them from precipitously falling and destabilizing the world economy again as they did a couple of year ago—it's necessary to have a substantial production increase that will not only close the gap between production and consumption on a daily basis but also enable the stocks to be rebuilt, because a lot of the oil price stocks have been drawn down too low, and that's one of the things that spiked the market so significantly.

But I think that in terms of the decision they will make, that's for them to make, and they'll have to announce it. I think they're struggling to try to get a consensus. But they are, I think, concerned because the last time they increased production, there was this really big fall in the oil prices to a level that even those of us in the consuming countries thought was too low.

But the problem is, that time they increased production just as the global economy went down, the Asian financial crisis and other problems. This time, we had the reverse effect. Just as the global economy was coming up in Asia and the Europeans were growing, they cut production, which had exactly the reverse impact. So first, prices went too low. Now, they've gone way too high.

In our country, for example, lower-income motorists, other motorists who live in rural areas and places where they have to drive a long way to work, and a lot of truckers, particularly independent truckers, have really, really been hurt by this situation. So there is a stable, win-win situation here that—where the fuel prices will be affordable by the American people and others, and they will still be able to have a fair return on their production and not risk the precipitous fall that they endured over the last couple of years. So they've got to find the right balance.

They can do that, but as I said, we need to have enough to meet daily consumption requirements and to rebuild the stocks.

### **China and Taiwan**

**Q.** Mr. President, any thoughts on China and the elections, on Taiwan?

**The President.** Well, we've already said publicly that we want to see a resumption of the cross-state dialog as soon as the election is over. But the election in Taiwan is for the Taiwanese people, and I don't think I should comment on it until they have all their votes in. And they'll elect a new President, and then we'll go from there.

### **Northern Ireland/South Asia**

**Q.** Mr. President, from a foreign policy standpoint, what is your best hope for this series of meetings this afternoon with Irish leaders, and what is your best hope on your upcoming trip to India and Pakistan?

**The President.** First of all, the good news about Ireland is that even though the institutions have been taken down over the difference between the parties on decommissioning, no one wants to go back to the way it was or give up the peace process. The voters in Northern Ireland in both communities have overwhelmingly voted for it, and I think there's no sense that I got yesterday in my

first round of encounters with the leaders that there's any desire to go back to the way it was.

I think what we've got to do is to find a formula by which the institutions can be restored, the people can get back to governing. They actually found out they were quite good at working together, and they were getting a lot done. And we need to restore that process, and we need to restore a process that will eventually lead to all the requirements of the Good Friday accord being observed, and we'll just keep working on it until we find that answer.

And on South Asia, obviously what I hope to do first is to rekindle the relationship between the United States and India. It's the world's largest democracy. No President has been there in 22 years. We have a lot of things that we can do together, a lot of mutual interests. I want to do what I can to reduce tensions on the Indian subcontinent to reduce the likelihood of weapons proliferation and the likelihood of conflict. And I want to do what I can to support the restoration of democratic rule in Pakistan and to continue our cooperation with them against terrorism and in many other ways that we have both profited from over many decades.

I also will be going to Bangladesh, and I'm looking forward to that. I have seen a lot of the initiatives taken in Bangladesh, particularly for the empowerment of poor people, that I think are important there and throughout the world. And if you look at the size and the potential of the Indian subcontinent, if they could find a way to manage their difficulties, there's probably no other place in the world with the capacity for growth and modernization over the next two decades that you will find there. If you look at the success of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis in the United States, that's clear evidence of that. So I'm going to do the best I can.

### **Syria**

**Q.** Do you have a meeting coming up with the Syrian President?

**The President.** I don't have anything else to say about my foreign policy agenda today. But I will in the next several days, continue to talk to you about all this stuff. And I thank you.



NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to city attorneys John A. Misci, Jr., of Camden, NJ, Manuela Albuquerque of Berkley, CA, and Dee Joyce-Hayes of St. Louis, MO; King Fahd Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; and President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria.

**Teleconference Remarks With  
Mayors on the Gun Safety  
Agreement With Smith & Wesson**  
*March 17, 2000*

**The President.** Hello.

**Participant.** Hello, Mr. President.

**Participant.** Hello, Mr. President.

**The President.** Thank you all for joining us. I'd like to start by asking everyone here on the phone to say their names and the city and the State they represent.

We have with us here in the Oval Office, Attorney General Spitzer of New York, Attorney General Blumenthal of Connecticut, Mayor Penelas of Miami, and Mayor Bill Campbell of Atlanta was here; he just walked out. So we're all here. But why don't we—everybody else who is on the phone say something about it, who you are?

*[At this point, the teleconference participants introduced themselves.]*

**The President.** We're delighted to have you on the phone call, and I want to say on behalf of not only the White House but Attorney General Reno and Deputy Attorney General Holder, Secretary Summers, and Deputy Secretary Eizenstat and Secretary Cuomo, we very much appreciate what you've done, and we congratulate you. I think that this agreement will fundamentally change the way the gun industry does business, and all of you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your leadership and involvement have helped to make all American communities safer. We couldn't be here without you, and I thank you.

Now, we've got to build on what we've accomplished today and continue to reduce gun violence. The long roster of leaders with us here today is proof that the whole Nation supports what we're doing, and we just need you to go out there and keep working with responsible mentors of the gun industry to

keep this momentum going. And I hope we can get some other manufacturers to join us.

I wonder if anybody who is here wants to say anything and anybody on the phone would like to say anything now.

*[At this point, participants in the teleconference made brief remarks.]*

**The President.** Thank you very much. If I could just echo two of the points that were made. First of all, I agree with the last point Mayor Penelas made. This proves, this agreement, that nobody was in it for the money. Everybody said all along, the States, the municipalities, and the Federal Government, nobody wanted any money damages; we just wanted a change in the way America lives to make it a safer place.

The second thing I'd like to say, to echo what Mayor Archer and Attorney General Spitzer said is, Smith & Wesson stuck their neck out here, and I think that all of us, including the Federal Government, in our procurement policies, if we really are serious about making America safer, ought to send a clear signal that we appreciate what they did. I think that that will accelerate the day in which the other manufacturers will follow suit.

I thank you all very much. This is a happy day, and I'm glad to talk to you all, and thanks for joining the phone call, and thanks for agreeing with the settlement.

Thank you all. Goodbye.

NOTE: The teleconference began at 2:37 p.m. The President spoke from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Alexander Penelas of Metro-Dade, FL; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI; Eliot Spitzer, attorney general, New York State; and Richard Blumenthal, attorney general, State of Connecticut. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the participating city officials.

**Message on the Observance of Saint  
Patrick's Day, 2000**

*March 17, 2000*

Warm greetings to everyone observing Saint Patrick's Day.

It is most fitting that the feast day of the Patron Saint of Ireland should be held on the threshold of spring, the season of promise, for the Irish have always been a people of promise. With warm hearts and a deep spirituality, they embraced the promise of salvation that Saint Patrick brought to their beautiful island 16 centuries ago and preserved their faith through the tumult and chaos of the Dark Ages.

In the 19th century, suffering from famine and oppression in their own land, millions of Irish men and women recognized the promise of freedom and opportunity in America. Often enduring great hardship, they journeyed west to begin a new life in a new land. With strength and humor, courage and determination, they made America's promise a reality for themselves and their children and enriched our history and heritage with their achievements. In business, labor, education, the arts, public life, and so much more, Irish Americans have made lasting contributions to the life of our nation.

Today Irish Americans and the people of their ancestral homeland share a strong commitment to the promise of peace. In the spring of 1998, the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland sought to fulfill that promise when they voted overwhelmingly in support of the Good Friday Accord. America remains committed to the Irish people as they continue working to forge a brighter future, for, while the road ahead is long, the promise of peace is still within reach and its rewards are great.

As Irish Americans gather once again to honor Saint Patrick and to reaffirm their pride in their Irish heritage, Hillary and I extend warmest wishes to all for a wonderful celebration.

**Bill Clinton**

## **Proclamation 7281—National Poison Prevention Week, 2000**

*March 17, 2000*

*By the President of the United States of America*

### **A Proclamation**

Children face many dangers growing up, including some which we cannot foresee or prevent. But the danger of accidental poisoning from medicines, household chemicals, or other substances used routinely in the home is something we can—and must—stop. Each year during National Poison Prevention Week, we assess our progress in saving lives and reaffirm our national commitment to preventing injuries or deaths from poisoning.

We have indeed made progress in the nearly 4 decades since the Congress first authorized this annual observance. In 1962, almost 450 children died of poisoning after swallowing medicines or household chemicals. By 1996, that tragic statistic had been reduced to 47. Our goal is to reduce it to zero.

The first and most effective means to achieving this goal is the proper use of child-resistant packaging, which the Consumer Product Safety Commission requires for many medicines and household chemicals. While this special packaging is child-resistant, however, it is not childproof; therefore, it is essential that adults keep potentially poisonous substances locked away from children.

Our second line of defense is America's poison control centers, where lifesaving information is only a phone call away. If a poisoning does occur, parents or other caregivers can call one of these centers and immediately learn the appropriate actions to take to mitigate the poison's effects. Last month, I was proud to sign into law the Poison Control Center Enhancement and Awareness Act, which authorizes \$140 million over the next 5 years to fund our Nation's poison control centers, to carry out a national public awareness campaign, and to establish

a national toll-free poison control hotline. Each year, more than 2 million poisonings are reported, a million of which involve children, and this new funding will ensure that callers have immediate access to the vital services and information they need to save lives.

I thank the Poison Prevention Week Council, which brings together 35 national organizations to distribute poison prevention information to pharmacies, public health departments, and safety organizations nationwide, for its vital role in the progress Americans have made in reducing accidental poisonings. By following its lead, properly using child-resistant packaging, keeping poisonous substances locked away from children, and keeping the number of a poison prevention center close by the telephone, we can greatly reduce accidental poisonings.

To encourage the American people to learn more about the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take responsible preventive measures, the Congress, by joint resolution approved September 26, 1961 (75 Stat. 681), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week of March of each year as "National Poison Prevention Week."

**Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton,** President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning March 19, 2000, as National Poison Prevention Week. I call upon all Americans to observe this week by participating in appropriate programs and activities and by learning how to protect our children from poisonous substances.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

**William J. Clinton**

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:31 a.m., March 20, 2000]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 21.

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## Digest of Other White House Announcements

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The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

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### March 13

In the morning, the President traveled to Cleveland, OH, and in the afternoon, he traveled to Chicago, IL. In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC, arriving after midnight.

### March 14

In the afternoon, the President had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. Later, the President was presented a portrait by photographer Arnold Newman in the Oval Office.

### March 15

In the evening, the President traveled to Baltimore, MD, and later, he returned to Washington, DC.

The President announced his intention to nominate Bernard Daniel Rostker to be Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

### March 17

Over the course of the afternoon, the President met separately in the Oval Office with the following Irish leaders: Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon and First Minister David Trimble, Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, and Labour Party leader John Hume.

Later in the afternoon, the President participated in a Saint Patrick's Day ceremony with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in the Roosevelt Room.

In the evening, the President and the First Lady hosted a Saint Patrick's Day reception in the East Room.

The President declared a major disaster in Alabama and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding on March 10–11.

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## **Nominations Submitted to the Senate**

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NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

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## **Checklist of White House Press Releases**

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The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements

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### ***Released March 13***

Statement by the Press Secretary: Belarus: Pro-Democracy Demonstrations

### ***Released March 14***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Joe Lockhart

Transcript of a press briefing by National Economic Council Director Gene Sperling and Office of Management and Budget Director Jack Lew on the budget resolution

Transcript of a press briefing by Office of Science and Technology Policy Director Neal Lane and Human Genome Project Director Francis Collins on the human genome project

Transcript of a press briefing by Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Ambassador Frank Wisner on the President's trip to India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan

### ***Released March 15***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Joe Lockhart

Announcement of nomination for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia

### ***Released March 16***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Joe Lockhart

Transcript of a press briefing by National Security Adviser Samuel Berger, Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economic Affairs Lael Brainard, and Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Rick Inderfurth on the President's upcoming visit to South Asia

Statement by the Press Secretary on the upcoming visit of President Mubarak of Egypt

### ***Released March 17***

Transcript of a press briefing by Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy Bruce Reed, Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Eizenstat, and Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder on the gun safety agreement with Smith & Wesson

Announcement: Official Delegation Accompanying the President to South Asia

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## **Acts Approved by the President**

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### ***Approved March 5***<sup>1</sup>

H.R. 3557 / Public Law 106-175

To authorize the President to award a gold medal on behalf of the Congress to John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York, in recognition of his accomplishments as a priest, a chaplain, and a humanitarian

### ***Approved March 10***<sup>1</sup>

H.R. 149 / Public Law 106-176

Omnibus Parks Technical Corrections Act of 2000

H.R. 764 / Public Law 106-177

To reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, and for other purposes

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<sup>1</sup> These items were not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

***Approved March 14***

H.R. 1883 / Public Law 106–178  
Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000

S. 613 / Public Law 106–179  
Indian Tribal Economic Development and  
Contract Encouragement Act of 2000

***Approved March 17***

S. 376 / Public Law 106–180  
Open-market Reorganization for the Better-  
ment of International Telecommunications  
Act